

Summary

The Millennial History and  
Culture of Silla

History

## Source Materials

Central Buddhist Museum  
Cheongju National Museum  
Daegu National Museum  
Gaya National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage  
Gyeongju National Museum  
Gyeongju National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage  
Haeinsa Seongbo Museum  
Japan Shosoin  
National Museum of Korea  
NAVER  
Yeongnam Institute of Cultural Properties  
Kwon Deuk-young  
Lee Young-ho

### Summary

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## Notes

1. This compendium spans the birth of the Silla Dynasty to the emergence of the Goryeo Dynasty.
2. This compendium is divided into sections on history and culture based on the content of the relevant series of research books.
3. This compendium was compiled as a material for general education with professionalism.
4. The compilers were selected from among the compilers of *The Millennial History and Culture of Silla*.
5. The original manuscripts in Korean were proofread and checked by working level staff.
6. The translations into foreign languages were checked by native speakers who have majored in the relevant fields.
7. Photo materials were included in the relevant series of research books and source materials.
8. The marking of terminologies in foreign languages followed the general usage in academic circles. The marking of proper names in English followed the Rules on Romanization.

## On the occasion of publication

The Silla Dynasty, which lasted for one thousand years, accomplished the great feat of unifying the three ancient kingdoms on the Korean Peninsula into one, the first great achievement of the Korean nation, and created a splendid civilization during its heyday.

Silla displayed a unique openness and progressive spirit and exchanged culture and civilization with many other countries via the Silk Road. However, it is a matter of some regret that there has yet to be published a history book featuring a comprehensive and systematic survey of Silla's history. Thus, we at the Gyeongsangbuk-do government began the project of compiling Silla's history as inhabitants of the former domain of the ancient dynasty, with a historic sense of mission to explore the ethnic roots of the Korean nation.

*The Millennial History and Culture of Silla* is thought to be the largest series of books concerning Silla's history. The series approaches the history of Silla in chronological order, ranging from the emergence of Saroguk, which was the matrix of Silla, through the unification of the entire Korean nation and the peninsula into one and finally, to the foundation of Goryeo. The series was compiled in an easy-to-understand way and covers Silla's politics, economy, society, and culture.

The compilation and publication of a series of books about the 1,000-year history of Silla constituted a huge project, but we thought it was a worthwhile effort given the enormity of Silla's history and the status of the dynasty as the wellspring of our present culture. The compilation of the series has been a long slow march, taking five years from the symposium we held in 2011 to discuss how to write it. It is a laborious work composed of more than 12,000 pages in 30 volumes made with the concerted efforts of some 136 Korean specialists in Silla history. It is the result of the knowledge, expertise, and conscientious work of the members of the compilation committee, the editing committee, and the writing staff.

The compilation of the series is not simply a record of past events. The important thing is to reestablish our self-identity by reviewing a major part of the history of our nation and restoring our sense of pride. We believe that the fruit of this work will serve as a precious resource for the history education of future generations, and that it will open the way to introducing the history of the Silla Dynasty as an outward-looking state that engaged in cultural exchanges with many other states. We also believe that the myriad stories, myths, legends, and cultural

heritage objects produced over a period of one thousand years will serve as an inexhaustible resource for our culture and tourism industries.

The world is changing day by day. If the Renaissance brought to an end the Dark Ages and the Industrial Revolution became the cornerstone of the foundation of modern society, then our own early 21st century can be said to be a period of profound cultural revolution. We live in a period in which material civilization is developing at an increasingly rapid pace under the impetus of smart technology. I believe that our genuine sense of identity in this era of high-end technologies is the very spiritual basis with which we can design the future.

The way people view history changes according to the prevailing situation, but one thing always remains unchanged, namely, the fact that the values of history become stepping stones that link the past with the present and define our future lives. This is the wisdom we can learn from history. Silla was a kingdom that disappeared long ago, but we know that we can live better in the present and the future by learning from its history and culture. Reviewing our past history and culture is a quest for our spirit and our soul.

After relocating the Gyeongsangbuk-do Provincial Office to Andong-Yecheon, we announced the opening of a new era. Timed to coincide with this new start, the completion of the compilation of *The Millennial History and Culture of Silla* assumes a special significance. I believe that this new series of history books will provide the spiritual and cultural groundwork for our province's journey into the new millennium. I hope that the work of compilation will serve as a prelude to another significant era for the citizens of our province and go a long way toward developing Koreans' historical consciousness. Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all of those who have worked so hard on this project.

December 2016  
Governor, Gyeongsangbuk-do

## On the occasion of compilation

During the first 700 or more years of its 1,000-year history, the Silla Dynasty, which began as Saroguk, one of the many polities of the Samhan Confederacy, grew as a kingdom competing for dominance with Goguryeo and Baekje on the Korean Peninsula. Thus, it would not be very wise to attempt to reconfigure the ancient history of Korea prior to Unified Silla with the focus on a specific country, and we can anyway obtain a truer understanding of the ancient history of Korea by approaching it from the perspective of the closely knit framework that included the Samhan and the Three Kingdoms (Silla, Baekje, and Goguryeo). Over the past half-century, research on the ancient history of Korea has made great strides forwards and considerable efforts have been made to compile materials on each kingdom or state that existed in the distant past based on the results of such research.

It is a well-known fact that scholars in North Korea have poured great effort into research on the history of Goguryeo in an attempt to present it as the most legitimate of the Three Kingdoms, while diminishing Baekje and Silla, for political purposes. As for us in the South, we have made ambitious attempts to organize the results of research on the history of Gaya and Baekje. Towards the end of the 1990s, the government launched the Gaya History Research Committee in the Ministry of Education & Human Resources Development. In tandem with this, the Korean Studies Institute of Pusan National University was assigned the mission of restoring the historic sites in Gimhae and organizing the results of the research on Gaya History and Archaeology up until the early 2000s. Furthermore, about a decade ago, the Chungnam Institute of History and Culture published the 25-volume Encyclopedia on the Cultural History of Baekje, which includes a 15-volume series of research books and the relevant literatures and archaeological materials, over a period of three years with the support of the Chungcheongnam-do Provincial Office.

In light of such a move, the Gyeongsangbuk-do Provincial Office's commencement of the compilation of *The Millennial History and Culture of Silla* in December 2011 in cooperation with the Gyeongsangbuk-do Institute of Cultural Properties is considered a meaningful attempt to reestablish the Silla Dynasty's splendid traditions. The history and culture of Silla formed the roots of the traditional local culture of Gyeongsangbuk-do Province, but it also laid the foundations of the history of the Korean nation. Studies of Silla history have played the role of a locomotive in research on the ancient history of Korea. *Samguk sagi* (History of the

Three Kingdoms, 1146) and *Samguk yusa* (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms, 1281), which are regarded as the two leading historical materials for students of the country's ancient history, feature a large amount of content centered around Silla. Surviving inscriptions engraved on stone or other durable materials, which serve as ancillary historical materials, date predominantly from Silla. The number of unearthed wooden tablets that vividly testify to the internal situation of Silla is no less significant than the number of those originating from Baekje.

To summarize, it can be said that we know more about Silla than we do about Goguryeo and Baekje among the three kingdoms that coexisted on the Korean Peninsula. In its process of growth and development, Silla was much influenced by the other two kingdoms in most areas including politics and culture. This means that we can make an educated guess about the culture, objects, and social systems of Baekje and Goguryeo based on those of Silla. Researchers specializing in the ancient history of Korea are in the process of forming the groundwork for understanding the history of the three kingdoms based on our deep knowledge of Silla. We at this Committee took part in the project (the compilation of 22 volumes of research on Silla's history and culture and 8 volumes of relevant materials, plus two volumes of summaries in Korean and their three foreign-language versions) with a profound sense of mission, believing that the focus should be on restoring the country's ancient history rather than on inspiring the people's love of their native land.

We experienced many difficulties in pushing ahead with this huge project, which included the collection of 270 articles written by 140 researchers, with the result that the publication of the series exceeded the original schedule by two years. The relocation of the Gyeongsangbuk-do Provincial Office also contributed to the delay. We feel honor bound to take our hats off to those in the provincial office for the great patience and understanding they displayed to the very last minute. We owe a great deal to Messrs. Lee Ju-seok, Joo Nak-young, Kim Hyun-ki, and Kim Jang-joo, each of whom assumed the role of co-chair of the Committee as former vice governors for administrative affairs of the province. Particular thanks are due to Professors Noh Choong-kook, Ju Bo-don, and Lee Hee-joon and Mr. Lee Dong-cheol of the Gyeongsangbuk-do Institute of Cultural Properties for their painstaking efforts over the past five years as members of the Committee.

December 2016

Chairman, Committee for Compilation of *The Millennial History and Culture of Silla*  
Lee Ki-dong

## The Millennial History and Culture of Silla

## History

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# Introduction

## Periodization

Silla was an ancient Korean kingdom that originated from the walled city-state of Saroguk, which was centered around Gyeongju. Silla was the final result of Saroguk, which grew in size by absorbing several characteristically similar political entities under its rule. In this sense, while Saro refers narrowly to the Gyeongju basin, Silla refers broadly to a state worthy of a state that included the territory centering around Saroguk. As Silla evolved into a state with a proper system of governance, the original Saro territory became its royal capital. Two confusingly interchangeable terms, Silla and Saro, are therefore clearly discernable in terms of their embedded meaning. In short, Silla encompasses the whole, whereas Saro constitutes a mere part of the whole. In other words, Silla's history was shaped by Saro's territorial expansion, and its timeline spans the period from Saroguk's formation to its final collapse.

According to a documented record, Silla was founded in 57 BC. This date also falls within the Saroguk period. Although this monumental year of Silla's foundation is too flawed by the fundamental and characteristic problem of arcane records to be accepted at face value, Silla's history, nevertheless, amounts to 1,000 years if we count from Saroguk's founding year to Silla's demise in 935 AD. Hence the expression, "Silla's 1,000-year history."

Silla, having originated from Saroguk, grew through numerous twists and turns. As such, it is difficult to systematically infer a broad view of Silla's evolution simply by projecting its history in terms of a temporal categorization. This is the reason for trying to understand the history of the Silla period by dividing it on the basis of the few turning points when it underwent radical changes. In doing this, the period when the Three Kingdoms were unified receives the lion's share of attention.

Even during the Silla period itself, the unification of the Three Kingdoms attracted much attention, which suggests that the people of those times saw it as a time of prodigious change. Concerning the magnitude of the changes that took place at that time, the *Samguk sagi* defines this period as the transition from the ancient period (57 BC–654 AD) to the middle period (654–780), while the *Samguk yusa* defines it as the transition from the middle ancient period (514–654) to the late period (654–935). Besides, contemporary historians clearly distinguish post-unification Silla from pre-unification Silla by the term 'United Silla.' As such, it makes sense

to understand Silla's history by dividing its timeline into pre- and post-unification of the Three Kingdoms. This concept germinated because it was recognized that weight should be placed on the importance and significance of the unification in the course of Silla's development. It is only this understanding of the intrinsic meaning and significance of Silla's unification in the context of the whole of Korean history that is contended by scholars with a variety of different views.

At any rate, it is still desirable to understand the respective halves of Silla's history by subdividing them into several periods. United Silla's mid-period is further divided into the middle (654–780) and late (780–935) periods according to the *Samguk sagi*. This is because of the recognition that a great socio-political transformation took place during each of these periods. By contrast, the *Samguk yusa* classifies pre-unification Silla into the early ancient (57 BC–514 AD) and middle ancient periods. This is also because these two periods are markedly different from each other. Not only is the period allocated to early Silla very lengthy, but a sweeping glance across this era also confirms the occurrence of great changes that require further subdivision for greater understanding. As such, the early ancient period can be split into a first half before and a second half after the enthronement of King Namul (r. 356–402) in the year 356 AD. This time point also marks the juncture at which Silla emerged from the stage of Saroguk and began standing on its own merits.

In this sense, Silla's history comprises two broad periods that branch out into five shorter periods. But on top of these five periods, one may add another definite period, that of a budding Saroguk, after which Saroguk is estimated to have been founded in 57 BC on the basis of documented records. This gives us six periods, each of which contains its own political, sociological, and cultural ramifications, making it possible to chart Silla's development in a more orderly fashion. This is also the main reason why Silla is examined in terms of per-book and per-chapter ranges defined by the aforementioned periodical classification.

## Materials for Historical Reconstruction and Research Approaches

*Samguk sagi* and *Samguk yusa* are used as basic sources for the reconstruction of Silla's history. As is typically the case in any country's history, however, Silla's early years are hard to grasp because the use of documented records as a frame of reference for the real situation in those days is somewhat problematic. Not only do most of the contents take the form of mythological or oral tradition narratives, but they also contain more than negligible subjective perspectives of posterity because of their belated documentation in later eras. Accordingly, we should accept the reality that heretofore bequeathed historical documents cannot be taken at face value.

Generally speaking, the history of Silla's early years refers particularly to the former half of the early ancient Silla period. Strictly speaking, however, it refers to Saroguk's history rather than Silla's. The chapter titled "Silla bongi" (Records of Silla) in *Samguk sagi* distinguishes the records on this period by specifically referring to them as early records because the authentication of those records is latently challenged to a serious extent. Regarding this theme, theorists diverge greatly over whether to apply the approval theory, disapproval theory, or revision theory. Although the revision theory is widely accepted in general, a close look at its content reveals that it is also not indiscriminate. By and large, one applies different approaches to understanding the chronology, royal titles, and events of the early records. According to the revisionists, recorded royal titles and events are deemed not to have been entirely forged. Concerning recorded events, however, later events appear to have been retraced or distorted. Thus, although the revisionists do not accept the chronology of the later events at face value, they diverge considerably as to the actual dates on which the events occurred.

There are various reasons why the records of the early period in *Samguk sagi* are not readily accepted. First, there is an ocean of difference between the contents in Dongyi zhuan (Accounts of the Eastern Barbarians) concerning the Three Han States in the Wei Shu (魏書, History of Wei) and those of the *Sanguozhi* (三國志, Records of the Three Kingdoms), which was drafted not so long after the era in question. These two history books about exactly the same period paint two completely different pictures. For example, Silla is portrayed as an established kingdom in the former, while Saroguk—Silla in chrysalis form—is described merely as a member of the Jinhan confederacy

in the latter. One of these two accounts must be misinformation. Second, materials secured through archeological excavations shed a different light on the early years of Silla. As opposed to the records on the early period, no archeological record has been found to support the claim that the Gyeongju basin had been the hub of a political entity, namely Silla, in possession of a wide expanse of territory since the first century BC. Third, by contrasting and comparing early records and materials such as steles, it has been verified that a significant number of events after the sixth century were retracted by several hundred years. In this respect, the civil service ranking system, or six official ranks system, is a case in point. Fourth, more than a few obviously incomprehensible and irrational facts in the early period records can be spotted even by untrained eyes. For example, the blood relationships between father and son, siblings, and grandparents and grandchildren demonstrate conventionally too great an age disparity to be rationally believable.

For all these reasons, great caution is recommended when employing early period records as suitable materials for the reconstruction of Silla's history. Because, unless one sieves them through a thorough evaluation process, one may end up inadvertently distorting history to an extreme degree; hence, one should be beware of the risks involved. As such, an ideal approach would consist in placing more weight on archaeological materials or steles while utilizing them very conservatively.

The main subject of the early period records, namely the former half of the early Silla period, should be understood as the history of Saroguk. Silla's standpoint is divided into two schools of thought, namely, Jeongiron (前期論, whereby Saroguk's history is included as part of Silla's history), and Jeonsaron (前史論, whereby Saroguk's history is clearly differentiated from Silla's history), when it comes to dealing with Saroguk. Jeonsaron approaches Saroguk as a predecessor stage of Silla, so it considers the history of Saroguk as leading to that of Silla, while in Jeongiron the history of Saroguk is taken as a part of the whole history of Silla.

Here the Jeongiron approach is problematic because it reflects the victor's history, in other words a center-orientated, result-based understanding. For example, although Saroguk evolved to become Silla, Saroguk did not amount to Silla itself. Saroguk was only one of the twelve member statelets of the Jinhan confederacy. From the Jeongiron standpoint, one runs the ensuing risk of weakening the content of the early history due to a tendency to streamline diversity so as to pursue commonality. As such,

it is more advisable to employ the Jeonsaron standpoint when dealing with the history of the early period because Silla comprises not just Saroguk, but also diverse political powers and cultures.

## Geographical Environment

The natural environment is one of the essential factors that determine the way we lead our life. Mankind can never be separated from nature. The reason why we have accomplished today's level of civilization is because we have not only abided by the laws of nature but have also defied and utilized them. Indeed, the resourceful people who took such steps and improved themselves were able to achieve self-transformation.

Geology and topography are two of the most influential factors in nature affecting humanity's way of life. Humanity has sought out suitable dwelling places, led an agricultural way of life, built housing for shelter, and improved productivity by intelligently exploiting its geographical surroundings. Furthermore, having settled and met their basic needs, people constructed a rank system based on the classification of their status; once classified, they created political powers; and, having established a political system, they ultimately founded a country. In this sense, in order to understand how a political entity forms and develops step by step, geographical conditions must be incorporated into our analysis. The outcome can differ widely depending on who uses the same conditions and how they use them. In turn, therefore, geography and topography are not independent variables when applied to human life, but are rather dependent variables, the results of whose usage may vary considerably depending upon how they are coupled and which human beings they are coupled with. That Silla united the Three Kingdoms by transcending its disadvantageous geographical position in the southeastern corner of the Korean Peninsula undoubtedly proves this.

The Korean Peninsula is characterized by its overwhelmingly mountainous topography. Rising eastward and sinking westward on the whole, the Korean Peninsula is a form of landmass referred to as "high in the east, low in the west." As such, most of the rivers originate from the east and run westwards. High mountain ranges originate from the Gaema Plateau that is biased toward the East Sea coast and runs southward in parallel with the coast, while some branches of the mountain ranges stretch westward. By the southern

end of Gangwon Province, their midrib takes a great southwestern turn in a semicircle to skirt the South Sea coast. This huge spinal column, which constitutes the basic mountain ranges of the Korean Peninsula, is called Baekdudaegan Mountain Range. One branch of Baedudaegan diminishes in height around the southern part of Gangwon Province and runs unchanged toward Busan before reaching the South Sea coast.

Silla's main territory, the Yeongnam region, lay within the aforementioned southwestern arching semicircle. It is enclosed by sea on its eastern and southern sides and by the Baekdudeagan mountain range on its northern and western sides. In fact, the entire Yeongnam region appears to form an enclave isolated from the outside world. This is one of its geographically advantageous aspects when viewed from the vantage point of the entire Korean peninsula. Originating at the border with Gangwon Province, the Nakdong River cuts through the center of the Yeongnam region, merges with tributaries originating from various mountain ranges, and grows bigger as it runs southeastward into the Gimhae area, before finally flowing into the South Sea.

As the long, meandering Nakdong River was prone to floods because of its large volume, numerous alluvial plains were created to make farming possible. The flumes formed near and around the Nakdong River and its tributaries were relatively densely populated because of their alluvial plains. About seventy basins of strongly independent character were formed, centering on hilly districts around the upper reaches of these flumes. Each basin has functioned as a village ever since mankind settled there, and remains unchanged to the present day. The intersections of the Nakdong River and its tributaries were the most populated areas at the beginning of the settlement period, which suggests that the river influenced the life of the local villagers considerably, serving as a crossroads where they could meet, trade, and socialize. In this sense, the Nakdong River can be regarded as a lifeline of Yeongnam and a major contributor to the course of Silla's development.

Overall the Nakdong River divides the Yeongnam region into east and west. Basically, a large river serves diverse purposes, including the transportation of passengers and freight back and forth. For a long time, the Nakdong River played just such a role. Therefore, a particular region along the river may have benefitted a great deal more than others in numerous respects. For example, the political power based in Gimhae on the Nakdong River estuary enjoyed advantages from the time of its early formation as a state up to the Byeonhan period for this reason. On the other hand, had



Fig 1. Geography of the Korean Peninsula

communication been severed under such geographical conditions, the river would have functioned as a boundary line or national border. A case in point is the Nakdong River's role between the time of King Gwanggaeto the Great's foray southwards and that of Gaya's collapse. Similarly, the Nakdong River has played many crucial roles in the Yeongnam region.

Saroguk evolved into Silla within the narrow confines of the Gyeongju basin. Indeed, the environmental conditions of the basin contributed significantly to Saroguk's transformation into Silla by subduing rival political powers. The Gyeongju basin occupies a crucial location guarding the route between the inland region and the coast. Being near the East Sea, it also functions as a gateway from the sea to the inland regions. In other words, the Gyeongju basin offers the advantage of allowing whoever controlled it to utilize both the inland and coastal areas. The development of Silla centered on the Gyeongju basin with the Yeongnam region as its platform. Thus, the geographical environment of the Yeongnam region was a significant contributory factor to Silla's growth.

# Features of Silla's History and Its Significance in Korean History

Silla made wise use of its geographical situation in the course of its development. One important feature to note is that the political situation in the north affected the south a great deal in the course of Korean history. Refugees and migrants from the political upheavals in the north made the exodus southward, having far-reaching ramifications for southern society. In small numbers they were easily assimilated into the mainstream local society; in large numbers, however, they brought about adjustments within their host society according to their influence. This is because the vast majority of the migrants were already used to an advanced culture and political system. Nonetheless, Goguryeo's destruction of the Lelang and Daifang Commanderies in 313 and 314, respectively, put an end to the ripple effect caused by immigrants of northern origin.

The Yeongnam region was an attractive destination for settlement by northern migrants who tended to cross the Han River directly or travel southward along the coast of the East Sea. Accordingly, people of diverse lineages and cultures converged on the Yeongnam region, which is why

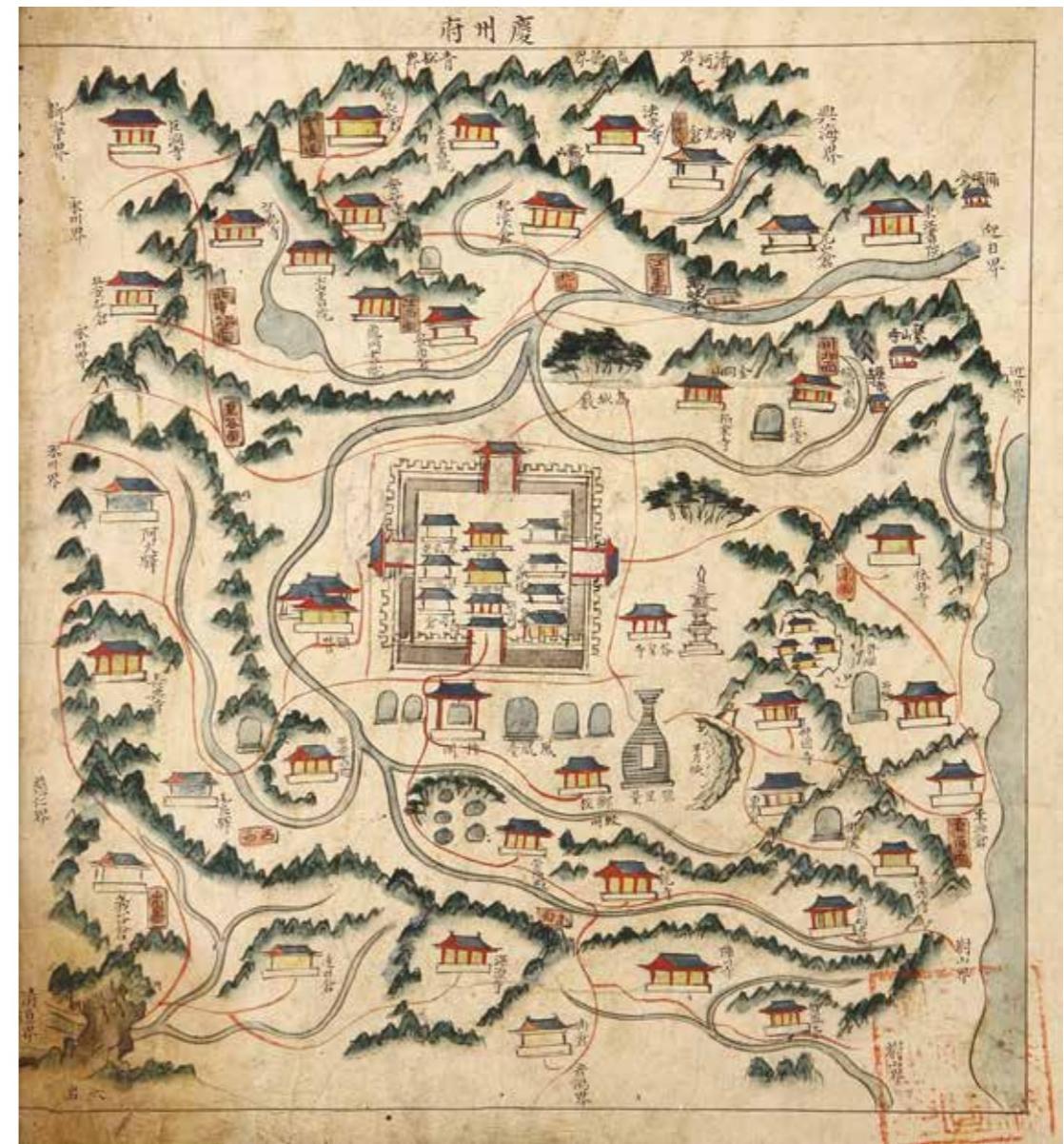


Fig 2. Road map of Gyeongju (from "Gyeongju-bu" in *Yeojido*)

Silla is generally referred to as comprising mainstream ethnic Koreans or Han people (韓), notwithstanding the more profound differences lying beneath the surface. Although it is more or less true that the ruling class consisted of ethnic Koreans, people of different ethnic groups such as the Joseon, Yemaek (濶貊), Mohe, Chinese Han (漢), and Wae (倭) also intermittently joined the waves of migrants, and thus contributed to the formation of the population and culture of Silla. The advanced cultures and products of their civilizations were naturally incorporated into the local civilization, contributing to Silla's evolution into a full-fledged state.

To sum up, the civilization of Silla was characterized by the fact that its constituents and culture came of age after a long period of cross-fertilization between products from diverse civilizations from the continent and from over the sea. Silla's people and culture were generally assumed to be conservative. Note, however, that this conclusion is drawn not from any insightful understanding of the overall culture but simply from the exclusiveness and xenophobia that characterized the "bone rank system." Silla's special caste system.

In short, this conclusion seems to have been drawn by excessively highlighting particular characteristics of the bone rank system, which has all too often been understood in the context of India's strict caste system. By emphatically generalizing Silla's culture across the board with such a biased impression, it became a foregone conclusion that Silla's culture must have been consistently conservative and exclusive. Because this conclusion is based on stubborn outdated prejudices, free from a review of the true identity of Silla's culture, let alone a deeper understanding of the bone rank system, it is invalid to say the least.

Besides, Silla leaves the impression that, having joined the race of cultural development later than its Korean rivals owing to its disadvantageous geographical situation, and after establishing its internal system to a certain extent, it had to open up in order to catch up with the forerunners. One could not expect to survive the ferocious competition by complacently sticking with the status quo. This fact is well supported by the excavation site of Jeokseok Mokgwakbun (積石木槨墳), a series of wooden chamber tombs with stone mounds built in the third—fourth centuries where, besides products of civilization from Goguryeo, artifacts from distant regions like Central Asia and beyond, including Roman glass, have been excavated. Moreover, as demonstrated by Silla's open adoption

of Buddhism, once Buddhism was publicly acknowledged, albeit belatedly, it spread like a forest fire, while earlier cases in nearby advanced countries paled in comparison. If it had not been for such an open and proactive approach, however, not only would Silla have been unable to emerge as the final victor of the wars for the unification of the Three Kingdoms, but it would also have been unable to sustain the united country for another 250 years. As such, it is preferable to define the character of Silla's culture as being very adventurous rather than narrowly judge it as being conservative. This adventurous character is most vividly apparent in Silla's foreign policy.

Silla's able human resources and their accomplishments are particularly outstanding among the multiple reasons for its success in unifying the Three Kingdoms. Notably, the ruling class of each period was endowed with remarkable diplomatic talents. As the saying goes, "The weak emerge triumphant over the strong by borrowing and exploiting the power of the strong." Up until the unification of the Three Kingdoms, Silla could not shed its status as the weakest of the three ancient Korean kingdoms. In the long term Silla could not ward off Goguryeo or Baekje, which were bearing down on it, by itself. Thus, it shifted sides constantly, sometimes in favor of a friendly Goguryeo against a hostile Baekje, at other times in favor of a friendly Baekje against a hostile Goguryeo. As Silla antagonized both Baekje and Goguryeo, it turned to the Chinese and ultimately emerged as the victor by surmounting many crises through an appropriate degree of dependence upon this foreign power. This was a feat accomplished by the ruling class by analyzing the international situation accurately and making the right decisions on the basis of their extensive experience and insight. In this sense, the unification by Silla was not just a military victory but also a triumph of the underlying policy centered on diplomacy. This is a key aspect to ponder vis-a-vis today's circumstances.

Silla finally succeeded in binding a motley group of political powers together after many twists and turns by rejecting separation, thereby laying the foundations for the establishment of one nation and one national culture. Although unifications and divisions have occurred repeatedly in the process of Korean history since then, the unification of the Three Kingdoms set a precedent, demonstrating the validity of uniting the peninsula into one country. In this sense, it is appropriate to regard the unification by Silla as a huge watershed event in Korean history as a whole.



Part 1

# The Formation and Development of Silla

The Formation of Saroguk

Establishment and Development of Silla

Transformation into a Centralized Power System and Its Operation

## Chapter 1

# The Formation of Saroguk

Prelude to the Creation of the State  
Formation and Structure of Saroguk  
The Fates of Jinhan and Saroguk

## 1

## Prelude to the Creation of the State

### World of Myths

There are few exceptions to the rule that a country's foundation history consists largely of myths and fables. When it comes to the 'genesis' myth of Silla, three branches of myths and fables about the country's foundation have been handed down, although they are nowhere to be found in the ancient records. Of course, such myths and fables are not historical facts and must have been considerably altered by subsequent human interference in the process of their transmission. Nonetheless, they are still worth examining as they embody a steady historicity as well as the philosophy of the Silla people. In other words, as long as they were not completely fabricated by subsequent generations, we should extract the historicity of those myths and fables in order to depict how Silla was founded.

Bak Hyeokgeose is considered the founding father of Silla according to the few surviving history books. Prior to his emergence, however, six preexisting village groups in the Gyeongju basin had asserted that they were of Joseon descent. One day, when the chiefs of the six villages were holding a conference in the vicinity of Alcheon (闕川), a flash of strange energy burst through the sky in the direction of Najeong (蘿井, Na Well) at the foot of Mt. Nam. There, the chiefs found a white horse bending down on its knees next to Na Well that suddenly soared into the sky, leaving only

a huge purple egg in its trail. When the chiefs broke open the egg, a child emerged. They reared this child, who was eventually enthroned in 57 BC.

In the context surrounding Bak Hyeokgeose's emergence, it is difficult to estimate how much historical truth is contained in which part of the story. It is quite probable that contemporary people sought to allegorically portray the arrival of a new foreign group with the products of an advanced civilization and its entry into the ruling class. Likewise, the story alludes to Bak Hyeokgeose spearheading the Bak clan's debut in the Gyeongju basin rather than an individual's debut. Bak, the family name, was only given retrospectively, but it gave the group its identity.

Although Bak Hyeokgeose's emergence is coupled with the first appearance of Silla in the aforementioned literature, his descendants were not always destined to succeed to the throne. An individual named Seok Talhae turned up as another new ruler.

What makes Seok Talhae special is the fact that his place of birth is concrete, unlike Bak Hyeokgeose's, which is vaguely referred to as being the sky. A handful of records stating that his origin lies in Dapanaguk (多婆那國), Yongseongguk (龍城國), and Wanhaguk (琬夏國) has been handed down. Anyway, Seok Talhae was fathered by a king in one of these countries and was born in the form of a huge egg. His father found his birth form ominous, placed the egg and some treasure into a chest, and sent it away in a ship. The drifting ship arrived in Geumgwanguk (金官國), only to be turned away by its people, who also found the ship eerie. Thereafter, the ship drifted back into Silla's waters.

Seok Talhae came out of a chest loaded into a ship that reached Ajinpo off the East Sea in the 39th year of Bak Hyeokgeose's reign. When an aged grandma discovered the ship in the nick of time, she forced open the chest only to find all kinds of treasure and a child inside it. The woman raised this child, who turned out to have scholarly accomplishments and a knowledge of geography, and eventually moved to the Gyeongju basin, only to conquer the fortress Wolseong occupied by Hogong (瓠公), who came from Wae and assisted Bak Hyeokgeose. Later on, he married King Namhae's daughter and was appointed to the position of Daebo (prime minister), before succeeding King Yuri on the throne. Seok Talhae entered the Gyeongju basin after gaining a lot of experience in another region. That he referred to himself as a blacksmith suggests that his people possessed iron technology. Nonetheless, Seok Talhae's people were numerically

inferior, ascending to ruling class status only after strengthening their power.

In the ninth year of Seok Talhae's reign, a rooster crowed in Sirim forest near Wolseong. Hogong, King Seok's prime minister, was sent to investigate. There, a small, gold-colored chest hung from the bough of a tree, under which a white rooster crowed. Hogong opened the chest and found a child in it. Impressed by the child's noble appearance, Seok Talhae reared him as his own heaven-sent offspring. The child was given the name of Alji (閼智) because he grew up to be smart and astute, and was given the family name Kim because he came from a gold-colored chest. Henceforth, Gyerim (鷄林), which literally means "rooster forest," replaced the name Sirim, and it was even used as the name of the country.

Alji was set up as the progenitor of the Kim clan that later succeeded to the throne in Silla. Still, he rose no further than the rank of prime minister, yet a mere six generations later, Michu was enthroned for the first time from the Kim lineage.

In such storytelling fashion, the literature conveys the fact that three groups emerged and converged in establishing Silla as a proper country, by borrowing from the fable format. This suggests that each of the three families moved into the Gyeongju basin one after another, and that they did not share common foundations or lineages.

It was not until the fourth century that the Kim clan cemented an exclusive hereditary system by overpowering the Seok and Bak clans. Thus, Silla is referred to as the Kim dynasty, and it is rather ironic that the dynasty's founder, Alji, ended up neither as Silla's king nor as its founding father, but only as the lone progenitor of the Kim lineage. It is indeed strange that the Kim clan did not give its royal authority for the construction of a fortress to Alji, who was Silla's progenitor after all, after it had established its monopolistic hereditary system. This suggests that there had been scarcely any manipulation or beautification of the contemporary world or royal titles when the history of Silla was published later. Moreover, the members of the Kim clan did not acknowledge the fact that the transfer of sovereignty from one family to another warranted the alteration of their country's title or their royal lineage. This stands conspicuously apart from conventional cases, and suggests that the nature of the country, i.e., rule by three ruling families, must have been very different from that of the later form of the country, thus meaning that the country was still at the Saroguk—rather than the Silla—stage of its development.

## Formation of Villages (Eumnak)

Although remote myths and fables about a country's foundation provide some rudimentary knowledge about its development, they cannot really give a concrete or realistic idea of the situation up to the emergence of a state, thus making it exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to determine how the early rudimentary structure of a state such as Silla was formed. As such, we are entirely dependent on archeological materials to judge that a meaningful number of villagers settled in the Gyeongju basin, produced a political elite through the classification of ranks, and finally founded the inchoate state of Saroguk.

It is hard to ascertain when people first began inhabiting the Gyeongju basin. Traces of habitations dating from the Old Stone Age have not been found, although the presence of dozens of Paleolithic sites has been confirmed in the Yeongnam region. However, because historic sites are usually found in and around the East Sea coast, Pohang, Ulsan, and Miryang, it is likely that Paleolithic people inhabited the Gyeongju basin as well. Because Paleolithic people led a nomadic life hunting and foraging in groups, they did not dwell in one place for long. Therefore, even if they inhabited the Gyeongju basin, they would probably have had little to do with the formation of Saroguk.

It is generally held that people abandoned the nomadic way of life and began settling in one place in the New Stone Age (Neolithic Age), largely due to the sedentary demands of agriculture. As people began farming and harvesting crops on a regular basis, they could afford to abandon hunting and the gathering of plants and berries and remain in one place instead. Settlement in turn gave people the time and resources required to develop a residential lifestyle. Consequently, they also began to manufacture breakable household items like earthenware. Furthermore, residential life led to the building of community ties as residents carried out basic production and consumption in groups, and a primitive community based on blood ties gradually emerged.

The New Stone Age in the Korean Peninsula is estimated to have started around 8,000 BC, and passed through several stages of development, given the shapes, patterns, material qualities, and production techniques of earthenware. As people arranged their residential sites in locations that were convenient for moving, hunting, and fishing—such as on the coast

or by riverbanks—at the beginning of the New Stone Age on the Korean Peninsula, agriculture had apparently not yet become established as the dominant source of people's livelihood. Even the earthenware of those days may have been produced to be small and portable, perhaps for the same reason. Agriculture seems to have become the major means of livelihood at a later time, suddenly rather than gradually. One thing for sure is that the dominance of agriculture led to the beginning of settled residential life.

The fact that historical sites from the New Stone Age have been discovered across the Korean Peninsula suggests that most regions were inhabited more or less evenly by people for the first time. It is worth noting, however, that widespread settlement is explained not just by people's procreation and the ensuing rise in population; an incessant influx of people from outside the peninsula also seems to have contributed to widespread settlement to an equal extent.

There are also more than a few historical sites of the New Stone Age in the Yeongnam region. The overall pattern of distribution indicates a situation in which the expanding population began to gradually move deeper inland along waterways, coastlines and riverbanks, albeit over a very long period of time. Furthermore, the discovery of some rare Neolithic sites clearly suggests that the people of the New Stone Age moved deep inland. A case in point is the Boulder Shade Site in Ojin-ri, Cheongdo-gun, which is estimated to date back to approximately 8,000 BC.

Small pottery shards from the New Stone Age have been found in Gydong near Namcheon (South Stream), while the vestiges of a dwelling site in its vicinity in the Gyeongju basin have also been confirmed. A dwelling site from the New Stone Age has also been discovered in Daebon-ri, Yangbuk-myeon on the East Sea coast. Village settlements were not very big at that time, probably consisting of fewer than ten dwellings. The Neolithic settlement sites found in the Gyeongju basin seem to have been no exception to this rule. Based on the relatively few excavations in the Gyeongju basin that have been carried out to date, the overall population appears to have been small, and the size of each individual group appears to have been small as well. Moreover, this small population's link with a later influx of Bronze Age settlers is also vague. In other words, there is no obvious evidence to support the idea that the people of the New Stone Age, though they may have entered the Gyeongju basin, were related to the foundation of Saroguk.

In fact, it was not until the eighth—seventh century BC or the early Bronze Age that the Gyeongju basin saw a significant rise in population. Small dwelling sites featuring patternless earthenware have been discovered in Yonggang-dong, Hwangseong-dong, and Chunghyo-dong among other places. Given their distribution pattern, however, they must have formed village settlements. Unlike the preceding New Stone Age's scant signs of settlement, settlement by early Bronze Age people would have represented a seismic change. Since Bronze Age settlers were barely related to their predecessors, the former must have arrived and begun to settle in the Gyeonju basin somewhat belatedly. Their dwelling places vary from low lying areas on riverbanks to the slopes of gentle hills and the skirts of steep mountains. Given their residential situation, it is natural to assume that they must have built their villages around streams and flumes. Part of a stone coffin tomb has been discovered as one of the tomb remains from those days.

From the stage immediately succeeding the early Bronze Age stage, the population began growing at a faster pace, leaving traces of clearer and more expanded village sites. This suggests that productivity rose significantly with the improvement of agricultural techniques, expanding the population and resulting in a more stratified rank system. As new farmland was developed, the habitable sphere expanded accordingly. Each community set up a clearly defined residential sphere and began to lead a more settled life within its orbit. In this way, these communities laid the foundations for further expansion beyond their limited realms through contacts and trade with nearby communities. Such phenomena can be inferred from such solid evidence as the spread of dolmen tombs—a form of private tomb at this stage of history.

Dolmen tombs have been found throughout the Gyeongju basin, though seldom in clusters. Most sites consist of only two or three tombs, and only a few sites have more than ten tombs. It is highly likely that a structure centering on a community with a concentration of more than ten tombs was created to lead contact and trade with surrounding communities. If such a permanent structure—wherein a special central community initiated contact and trade with its immediate neighboring communities—existed, it can be assumed to have been an earlier form of *eumnak* (邑落) or village of the kind that formed in earnest later on. The formation of villages as the fundamental units of a rudimentary state appears to have started in the dolmen era.



Fig 1. Distribution of dolmen sites in and around Gyeongju

To recap, villages in those days were still in an initial and somewhat primitive stage, being small in number and weak in terms of internal solidarity. Given the meager number of grave goods found at the dolmens, agricultural productivity must have been relatively low, with a very low degree of rank classification and cultural development. Accordingly, it is hard to assess whether the *eumnak* belong in any way to the early stage of formation of a rudimentary state. *Eumnak* are presumed to have emerged at the time of dolmen tombs in a form that foreshadowed the aforementioned six villages that laid the foundation for Saroguk's emergence.



## Formation and Structure of Saroguk

### Establishment of Saroguk

In approximately the third century BC, a new culture quite unlike what had existed previously that had given rise to dolmen tombs began to dominate the Yeongnam region. Wooden coffin tombs, profoundly different from dolmen tombs, began to appear and were followed by recurring cultural changes.

Aside from the burial system, burial goods found in the dolmens differed in terms of their quality and quantity. In dolmen tombs, either meager amounts of bronze goods or stone goods similar to those of the Neolithic Period have been discovered. On the other hand, the bronze goods found in wooden coffin tombs are far more sophisticated. Earlier burial goods consist mostly of bronze artifacts designed for ritual purposes, such as mirrors with knobs (*danyugyeong*, 多紐鏡) and cauldron-shaped bronze wares, and appear to have been precursors of imminent major changes. The change in the quality of bronze burial goods suggests that the purchase impulse had matured. In other words, the increased political and economic power of the ruling classes had fueled their desire to express their improved status in a superficial, materialistic form. Earthenware, a type of roll-rimmed pottery, also differed from its predecessors, and wooden coffin tombs began to appear in clusters.

It is worth noting, however, that such changes did not occur across the entire Yeongnam region but only in certain areas, particularly in Daegu. In Gyeongju, such changes have been confirmed in Ipsil-ri. These ritual bronze artifacts are similar to those found in the Hoseo and Honam regions and either developed under the latter's influence or as a result of migration from the latter region. Still, such a ripple effect was not strong enough to change the preexisting society from the ground up, though it would undoubtedly have had a stimulating effect on the indigenous society.



Fig 2. Bronze artifacts allegedly excavated in Jukdong-ri, Gyeongju (Lee Yang-seon Collection)

If a major change occurred because of large-scale migration around that time, one cause may have been the fall of King Jun of the Old Joseon (Go Joseon) Kingdom in the third century BC. Wiman (衛滿) of Joseon ancestry, who used to be ruled by Yan (燕), an ancient Chinese state during the Han dynasty, escaped Yan while its rulers were distracted by internal socio-political turmoil. Indebted to Old Joseon for his safety in exile, Wiman subsequently overwhelmed his host country with a sudden attack. The sizeable diaspora caused by the fall of King Jun spilled over into the south, largely into the Hoso area, although the arrival of settlers must inevitably have had an impact on the Yeongnam region as well.

Yet another cultural change followed in the Yeongnam region from the late second century to the early first century BC, this time much greater in magnitude and more diverse in content. Recently, not only advanced bronze objects like narrow-bladed daggers (*sehyeongdonggeom*, 細形銅劍), bronze spearheads (*dongmo*, 銅鋒), and pole-top bells (*ganduryeong*, 竿頭鈴), but also iron objects such as steel daggers, iron spearheads, and so forth have been found inside tombs. Initially, these were brought in small quantities through contact with individual villagers, and in large quantities shortly after that. Later, they were produced locally with the arrival of a new, updated form of wooden coffin tomb.

Similar cultural changes took place intermittently thereafter as well. In the Gyeongju basin, cultural historical sites in Deokcheon-ri, Jukdong-ri, Joyang-dong, Hwangseong-dong, etc., clearly correspond to this trend. In Daegu, such changes have also been confirmed in Wolseong-dong and Paldal-dong. Wooden coffin tombs are distinguished from their predecessors by an Iron Age cultural signature rather than a Bronze Age one. Such changes were not confined to particular regions; rather, the changes were found to have swept across the Yeongnam region swiftly and almost simultaneously. Nonetheless, any change marking a watershed from the short-term perspective signifies the discontinuation of a preexisting culture. Furthermore, such a swift wholesale change must be interpreted not as a home-grown phenomenon but as an abrupt imposition of a foreign culture brought in by an influx of migrants from abroad.

Wooden coffin tombs were then constructed in clusters. These tomb clusters form cemeteries of certain groups within the vicinity of their settlement villages. Even among wooden coffin tombs in the same cemetery, there are marked differences between the tombs of the rich and

powerful and those of the poor and weak in terms of their size, quantity, and the quality of the grave goods that they contain. The tombs of the rich and powerful were very limited in number and not built in the same area as earlier tombs of their class. These findings suggest that those in power did not build their tombs in locations set apart from other members of the same group. This theory provides circumstantial evidence that internal classification had advanced to a relative degree but not so far as to warrant nepotistic succession within the same blood-tie group.

Various graveyards in the Gyeongju basin exhibit a set pattern, although they differ slightly in terms of their size, state, and the composition of their grave goods. This means that they shared not just the same material culture but also non-material cultures including such customs as funeral rituals and procedures. This shared set pattern across the culture indicates that no individual group acted alone but instead formed relations with other groups through constant interaction, resulting in the creation of durable networks.

An influx of people with well-developed Bronze and Iron Age cultures set a new dynamic in motion in the Gyeongju basin. *Eumnak* (villages) of similar size and character began to emerge. Rudimentary *eumnak* based on the rank classification of the late dolmen era had taken concrete shape by then, and radically different new *eumnak* were also established. Admittedly, a group with absolute power had not yet emerged, and all of them were based on cultures of more or less the same scale and level. Within the *eumnak* (邑落), a central district represented by an *eup* (邑) and a peripheral area represented by a *rak* (落) could coexist. In short, the combination of the two made up an *eumnak*, and these began to appear in the Gyeongju basin in earnest, as is clearly suggested by the appearance of clusters of wooden coffin tombs.

Likewise, such phenomena turned up in general within a radius bound by roads stretching outward in all directions from the Gyeongju basin. This almost simultaneous sharing of culture means that it happened not in a gradual, step-by-step fashion but rapidly and abruptly. Moreover, the fact that no verifiable starting point has yet been identified suggests that the phenomenon took place simultaneously in multiple areas. It also implies that such a phenomenon was induced not by a home-grown evolutionary process but by external pressure. In other words, it may have been the consequence of a mass influx of migrants into the Gyeongju basin.

If a large scale cultural change took place not just in the Gyeongju

basin but also across the entire Yeongnam region from the late second century to the early first century BC, what probably engendered it was the defeat of Wiman Joseon by the Han dynasty in 108 BC. The exposure of internal divisions as a symptom of imminent collapse prompted an exodus of its people, which was accelerated by its eventual collapse. These refugees followed the Han River en masse, sparking chain reactions along the way. At that time, Jin (辰), a federation composed of several political entities, stretched across the Han River basin. As refugees infiltrated into Jin intermittently, the federation was shaken to the core and ultimately collapsed. As refugees, together with survivors from the Jin federation, migrated southward in massive numbers, the indigenous society of the Yeongnam region underwent great changes. Each region reacted to this external shock in different ways, which can be categorized into three types.

In the first type, well-established indigenous powers took the initiative to embrace the advanced products of migrants and refined their *eumnak*. In cases where the migrants were not numerous, the indigenous society could lead the change. As such, change from the ground up did not happen abruptly, and only a minor reformation of the indigenous society occurred from a short-term perspective. As regards the second type, groups of migrants superior in number and civilization to the indigenous population overwhelmed the host society. In this case, the migrants rapidly reformed their host society from the ground up. As for the third type, in cases where the migrants and the indigenous population were equal in terms of power and ability, they found a middle ground, and sought and strengthened mutual solidarity, changing the established order only gradually.

Although we do not know in which region and in which way the abovementioned processes progressed, we do know that there was a marked difference between the leading regions, with their diligent adoption of foreign culture, and the regions that lagged behind, even within the Yeongnam region. The former case, in which migrant-led change and cultural change occurred in the Gyeongju basin, clearly demonstrates this phenomenon. This is proven not only by the discovery of archeological materials but also by written records. As mentioned earlier, the emergence of Bak Hyeokgeose and the foundation of Saroguk are closely related to the impact of mass migration on the Gyeongju basin.

Thus, many new migrant-led *eumnak* were established right across the Gyeongju basin, while the preexisting indigenous societies must have

undergone a great deal of transformation, albeit to different degrees. It is likely that migrants and natives integrated to some extent under such circumstances and worked together for their self-preservation, seeking mutual cooperation in political and economic terms. In this fashion, small communication networks would have formed as cooperative relations between two previously unrelated villages that were brokered by their common friendship within certain parameters, and in no time at all one big communication network would have emerged from the many smaller networks. This new, much larger network would have been loose at the beginning because of the many newly-brokered relationships, before gradually forming into a solid network over time. Through this process, an early form of state gradually took shape, and one such inchoate state based in the Gyeongju basin was Saroguk.

### The Structure of Saroguk

The type of inchoate state founded in the fashion mentioned above was usually referred to as a tribal state or walled-town state in the past. Nevertheless, an opinion that *eumnak* state or village state is the proper term of reference has emerged, because all of the inchoate states shared the feature of *eumnak*. We concur that, because *eumnak* is the central feature when describing these inchoate states, the term *eumnak* state should be employed here as well.

An *eumnak* state generally consisted of several *eumnak* or villages. Naturally, there were diverse differences not only between the *eumnak* but also between the *eumnak* states in terms of their size and range. The *eumnak* had a different boundary range and population composition; some *eumnak* had a relatively wider boundary range and a larger population while others had a smaller population and a narrower boundary range. Generally speaking, geographical locations and cultural conditions were the determining factors.

Furthermore, the actual composition of the *eumnak* states was also diverse. For instance, there were *eumnak* states composed of a single *eumnak*, while others consisted of more than six or seven *eumnak*. Inevitably, an *eumnak* state consisting of multiple *eumnak* had a relatively larger population and territory, and this physical supremacy translated

into greater economic power. Usually, a region with a transport hub or a large agricultural hinterland was home to a larger *eumnak* state. This is the reason why Saroguk, which was based in the Gyeongju basin, a regional transportation hub, was one of the biggest *eumnak* states.

The scale and structure of the *eumnak* varied, not only from region to region but also from one period to another. Productivity rose further with the widespread adoption of iron farming tools, and the population increased rapidly. Accordingly, as the internal ranks within the *eumnak* became stratified, they also became increasingly political. Over time, these mini states inevitably underwent a process of internal evolution, and their structure and character changed accordingly.

When the first *eumnak* states began to emerge, they had a strongly autonomous character. Although there were naturally some variations between the different *eumnak* states, the political and economic disparities between them were basically insignificant. *Eumnak* states within the same range and sphere probably started life almost at the same level—indeed, the status of wooden coffin tombs excavated so far attests to this. Note, however, that the similarity of the states' political and economic standing foreshadows the approaching fierce competition among them to gain the upper hand.

The incessant inflow of advanced culture and the rise of productivity created a gap between developed and underdeveloped *eumnak* that gradually became permanent. The internal solidarity of the *eumnak* state was further strengthened around the leadership of one particularly powerful *eumnak*. The leading *eumnak* was called a *gugeup* or state town. In short, the structure of the *eumnak* state consisted of several inter-connected *eumnak* that were politically centered around their state town. Thus the pecking order among the *eumnak* was even more clearly defined.

A state town's status was not always immutable, however. An *eumnak* state's internal composition could undergo changes amid the ups and downs of the fiercely competing *eumnak*, and a dominant state town would not have been exempt from these fluctuations. The ruler's title later adopted in Saroguk, mirrored such capricious changes.

The highest ruler in Saroguk was referred to as the *isageum*. Before the emergence of the *isageum*, however, the ruler had been referred to initially as the *geoseogan* and then as the *chachaung*. Literally, this title translates as tooth (*isa*) and senior chief (*geum*); hence many-toothed senior chief. The

term 'many-toothed,' a metaphor for rich wisdom gained from extensive experience, referred to a respected elder. In other words, *isageum* refers not necessarily to a ruler with absolute power but simply to a relatively powerful ruler. This title is appropriate for the ruler of Saroguk, which was composed of multiple *eumnak*, because its *isageum* stemmed from three families, Bak, Seok, and Kim, among which the as yet inchoate Silla throne alternated. Later, these three groups were often referred to as clans, but in truth they were actually *eumnak* or villages.

The three clans were relatively more powerful than their *eumnak* peers constituting Saroguk. The fact that one of their chiefs rose to the status of *isageum* means that the clan from which the *isageum* originated was promoted to state town status. In other words, the status of an *eumnak* changed in proportion to the change in the status of its head. Note, however, that this fact also suggests that the *isageum* or political head was readily subject to replacement. Moreover, this demonstrates clearly the nature of Saroguk as a state. No *eumnak* was sufficiently dominant or powerful to form a centralized political authority at that time. In this sense, an *eumnak* state was actually a federation of *eumnak*.

Each *eumnak* state adopted its own state title as a means of identifying itself. It can be surmised that the state title changed to reflect changes in the state town. A case in point is Yeomsaguk, which appears in the ancient records until the early first century but then vanishes without a trace by the mid-third century. In light of Yeomsaguk's fate, the state title found in the *Sanguozhi* (Records of the Three Kingdoms) shows the real situation in the mid-third century but does not necessarily represent the reality in the second or first century BC. The same goes for Saroguk. The *eumnak* states must have experienced many ups and downs after their foundation, with each and every fluctuation likely to have been followed by significant changes, as exhibited to a certain degree by the emergence of the Jinhan federation.

## 3

## The Fates of Jinhan and Saroguk

### Saroguk as a part of Jinhan

Above all, new styles of earthenware such as purse-shaped bowls and jars with horn-shaped handles began to appear in the Yeongnam region from the mid-first century BC. They are comprehensively referred to as gray pottery according to their material quality. As the gray pottery of the period is believed to have been made of finer ceramic clay and fired in a more closed kiln, its origins must have differed from that of roll-rimmed pottery. Although its provenance cannot be verified, it appears to have spread gradually across the entire Yeongnam region. This phenomenon suggests that the construction of a networking infrastructure that channeled the new style of pottery was under way among the *eumnak* states. The widespread production of gray pottery points to a phenomenon whereby the population of an extensive territory shared the same overall culture. This common cultural sphere implies a network of a much greater range than that of a single *eumnak* state, and suggests that a kind of loose federation of *eumnak* states had come into being, as demonstrated by the establishment of Jinhan and Byeonhan.

A single, isolated *eumnak* would naturally have yielded a certain amount of independence upon joining an *eumnak* state, as membership of a bigger political entity would decisively swing its fate toward future



Fig 3. Unglazed earthenware discovered at the Joyang-dong Ancient Tomb No. 38 in Gyeongju

survival. *Eumnak* states ballooned in size by attracting nearby *eumnak*, but only up to a certain point, and then stopped growing once their resources had become too thinly stretched to warrant further expansion. For example, the existence of natural geographical conditions or political powers formed beyond the boundary of an *eumnak* state must have posed certain challenges. Under such circumstances, each *eumnak* state had to be content with merely forging relations with other *eumnak* states within easy reach, because even remote *eumnak* states situated far from one another would have been far better off cooperating with relatively close neighbors than remaining isolated. Whether for the purpose of standing up to a political threat from outside their common sphere, trading their respective surplus products, or jointly engaging in long-distance communication in an effort to reduce costs and mitigate risks, the *eumnak* states were far better off

even within a loose federation than otherwise. Besides, although joined only by loose ties in the early days of federation, the *eumnak* states were strengthened by their ties as the need for union arose and intensified. Or, to put it another way, a federation that had originally formed mainly out of economic need grew ever more political.

Both the timeline and the course of Jinhan's formation are ambiguous, save for the fact that Jinhan is known to have been up and running by the early first century. The historical account of Yeomsachi in the section on Hanjo of "Tungyi-chuan" in the *Sanguozhi* (Records of the Three Kingdoms) corroborates this.

The name Yeomsachi originally referred to a chief and an official post in Yeomsaguk (i.e. Yeomsa State) rather than to a particular individual, i.e. to someone who also held the title of Ugeosu or Right-hand chief in Jinhan at the same time. For some unknown reason, Yeomsachi left his *eumnak* and headed to the Nangnang Commandery. When he was about halfway there, he was told by a person named Horae that he and his 1,500 colleagues were Han Chinese and had been captured and enslaved for forced labor by Jinhan three years previously when they had come there for logging work. Yeomsachi relayed this news to the Nangnang Commandery and, upon returning to Jinhan as the Nangnang Commandery's representative, received damages amounting to 15,000 Jinhan people and 15,000 rolls of Byeonhan cloth (Byeonhan *po*, 弁韓布) as compensation for some 500 Han Chinese who had died in captivity.

This historical story spans the duration of Wang Mang's Xin dynasty (新), which was founded after the collapse of the Western Han dynasty (20th–22nd year of Di-huang's reign). Byeonhan appeared here along with Jinhan, which means that the Samhan (Three Han States) had definitely been established before the early first century. Not only can the existence of a Jwageosu or Left-hand chief be inferred from the existence of an Ugeosu (Right-hand chief), but the fact that Jinhan had an organizational structure can also be deduced. That Yeomsaguk had little difficulty seceding from the Jinhan federation reflects the fact that the federation was loosely formed and that affiliation was not mandatory. In other words, each *eumnak* state could join or secede freely. The fact that the Jinhan federation started with six *eumnak* states and later grew to a federation of twelve such states is circumstantial evidence for this.

Since the Jinhan federation lasted through the early first century, it

is reasonable to conjecture that its establishment dated back to the time before the first century BC at the latest. The establishment of the federation proceeded either in parallel with the formation of its *eumnak* states or took place not long afterwards. Notably, if the syllable "Jin" in the term Jinhan refers to "Jin" of Jinguk (Jin state), it is likely that the leading group of people who supported the federation system already had experience in forming a federation; thus, an influx of people who had experience of such a federation naturally resulted in the formation of a federation as well as the *eumnak* states.

Although the Jinhan federation erected few or no barriers to the admittance or secession of *eumnak* states, a leader was nonetheless present. Even though the identities of the powerful constituents of Jinhan remain unknown to us, it is likely that the most prosperous *eumnak* state produced the leader of the federation. The source of power of the leader of the early Jinhan federation is also unknown, but it was most likely Saroguk, given its geographical advantages. What is harder to determine, however, is whether the then state title remained unchanged until a later date. Because the dominant internal power was occasionally replaced by another one, whether the third-century state title actually dates back to the first century BC is unclear.

### Jinhan's Fluctuating Status and Saroguk

Having started out as a federation of loosely tied *eumnak* states in the first century BC, the Jinhan Federation was not very cohesive. As such, it cannot have been easy for the federation to subsist in its original form amid the various intermittent pressures, and it appears to have followed a continuous and volatile pattern of shrinkage and expansion. As exemplified by Yeomsachi's case, even preexisting *eumnak* states continued undergoing intense fluctuations following the rise and fall of powers. On top of that, the mass influx of migrant populations and the inflow of products from advanced civilizations posed formidable challenges. Until the third century, the territory underwent a constant change. Frequent upheavals of such magnitude naturally gave birth to internal changes in the *eumnak* and the *eumnak* states, including changes in the leadership of the federation. Accordingly, it would be unjust to Jinhan society to apply a single standard

for all throughout the entire period of Jinhan's existence.

With the turn of the century, another upheaval is worth noting. At that time, the Eastern Han dynasty was rushing headlong towards ruin and had even lost control of the Nangnang Commandery. As its mainland sank into a sea of chaos, the Nangnang Commandery collapsed and its population dispersed, gradually finding its way into the three Korean states (Samhan) to the south, including Jinhan.

The deterioration of the Han Commanderies resulted in the growing vigor of Korean society. The section on Hanjo in "Tungyi-chuan" of the *Sanguozhi* (Records of the Three Kingdoms) narrates how the expansion of the Hanye (Koreans and the Yemaek) posed a threat to the Nangnang Commandery. The background to the rapid growth of the Samhan, which was enough to threaten the Nangnang Commandery, can be attributed to the growth in productivity resulting from the increasing sophistication of the Iron Age culture. Around this time, wooden-chamber tombs began replacing wood coffin tombs, providing sufficient evidence of the state of cultural development at that time.

Compared to wooden coffin tombs, wooden chamber tombs were far more spacious and contained a greater quantity of grave goods. Unlike earlier tombs, they contained a significant number of iron farming tools and weapons, as well as iron plates and other standardized iron materials. These iron products were of incomparably greater quality and quantity than their predecessors, as were the various decorative status symbols made of crystal and jade. As with the wooden coffin tombs, however, wooden chamber tombs for the rich and powerful were constructed in clusters set apart from other graves.

This reflects the fact that not only did productivity improve across the board, but that wealth was also being concentrated among certain individuals. Moreover, it shows that political and economic power had started to become hereditary within certain groups, although not in a uniform pattern across all of the *eumnak* states. Although with regional variations, the *eumnak* with supremacy tended toward a concentration of wealth and power among certain individuals rather than among their peers. Moreover, this concentration of wealth and power occurred not only at the individual level but also at that of the *eumnak*. Saroguk appears to have embodied this trend given that Joyang-dong and Deokcheon-ri in Saroguk were found to have significant clusters of wooden chamber tombs.



Fig 4. Wooden Chamber Tomb No. 19 of Deokcheon-ri in Gyeongju

Along with the emergence of wooden chamber tombs, significant changes occurred internally in Jinhan's *eumnak* states and its constituent power groups. The transfer of power from the Bak clan to the Seok clan had occurred by this time. The Seok clan moved into Saroguk, bringing with it the advanced culture of the Iron Age which enabled it to rise to a position of dominance and eventually provide the *isageum*. This also means that the Bak clan's state town was replaced with the Seok clan's state town. Although it is difficult to ascertain whether the Seok clan brought in various products of an advanced civilization, including the wooden chamber tombs, one thing that is certain is that the Seok clan accelerated the growth of Iron Age culture, and that the wooden chamber tomb culture was one of its byproducts. Indeed, the Seok clan led the development of the Iron Age culture, and thus Saroguk, headed by the Seok clan, is believed to have cemented its status as the leading *eumnak* state of the Jinhan federation.

As the Eastern Han fell into decline, the Gong Sun clan (公孫氏) built up its own power bases. It coped with the treacherous geopolitical situation by setting up the Daifang Commandery (K. Daebanggun, 帶方郡) in Hwanghae Province in the early third century to prevent its population from leaving the region, after having taken over the Nangnang Commandery. Soon afterwards, however, Cao Wei (曹魏), which succeeded the Eastern Han that had occupied the Liaodong Peninsula, took over the Nangnang and Daifang Commanderies and tightened its grip over these territories according to its east-oriented policy. Furthermore, as a means of keeping the Samhan under control, Cao Wei attempted to coordinate its occupied territories by vesting them with such titles as *eupgun* (town ruler) and *eupjang* (town chief), whose ranks were warranted by Cao Wei's vouchsafing of their indigenous power groups' seals and clothes. Aside from this, Cao Wei also attempted to merge eight *eumnak* states of the Jinhan federation with the Nangnang Commandery, but this policy, with its latent intention to weaken and disintegrate Jinhan society, immediately provoked a revolt by the indigenous Korean societies, which launched preemptive attacks on 246 counties and prefectures. Although the identity of the main agent of the war and its consequences are subject to controversy, it is certain that the Samhan had grown strong enough to wage war against the Nangnang counties and prefectures.

The Samhan attempted to keep up the momentum with a bold attempt to forge direct relations with the Chinese mainland. As a result, for twenty

years between the 270s and 290s, Mahan and Jinhan communicated with mainland China on many occasions. Although these diplomatic contacts were conducted under the banners of Mahan and Jinhan, their *eumnak* states were the driving force behind this diplomacy. The number of participating *eumnak* states varied, ranging from only a few to as many as thirty. This inconsistency also exposes the inefficiency of the loosely integrated federation system of Mahan and Jinhan, which were not efficiently controlled organizational bodies but voluntary, somewhat loose assortments of states. The powerful, ruler-centered, superior *eumnak* states must have led the way, although not without certain limitations, whereas willing participants must have contributed far more zeal and motivation to achieving the end results. After all, whoever was willing to run the risk of making the long journey to China must have felt an overpowering need to obtain the products of a more advanced civilization. Such a desire in turn reflects the fact that a number of precursors of great change were surfacing within the Samhan at that time.

As the outbreak of the War of the Eight Princes (八王) within the Xijin dynasty (西晉) led to a breakdown in diplomatic exchanges with China, however, Jinhan and its fellow Samhan societies came face to face with a new situation that nevertheless presented Saroguk with a heaven-sent opportunity to lead Jinhan.

## Chapter 2

# Establishment and Development of Silla

Establishment of Silla  
Formation and Government of a Regional Polity Administration System  
Commencement of Local Governance and Change of Governance System  
Conflict within the Ruling Class and the Pursuit of a New Order

## 1

## Establishment of Silla

### Transformation from Saroguk into Silla

The diplomatic relationship with China cultivated by Jinhan in the late third century lasted for almost twenty years until it was suddenly abandoned. The same was true of its neighbor, Mahan, which was caught up in a race with Jinhan to forge closer ties with China. This suggests that the abrupt discontinuation was caused not by an internal problem in Jinhan so much as by internal political turmoil in the Chinese Jin (晉) dynasty. Then, as nomadic tribes like the Xianbei and the Xiongnu, known as the Five Barbarians (Wuhu 五胡), encroached into the central agricultural region of China from the steppes in the early fourth century, the entire region descended into chaos, making it impossible for Jinhan to sustain its diplomatic exchanges with China any longer.

At this time, Goguryeo, which had launched itself on a course of energetic expansion into the Manchuria region, suddenly turned its attention southward to the Daedong River basin and destroyed the Lelang (313) and Daifang Commanderies (314) in quick succession. Goguryeo's conquest of the Lelang and Daifang regions sent shock waves through the three Han societies of Mahan, Jinhan, and Byeonhan. In an atmosphere of high political tension stirred up by Goguryeo's northern conquest, Jinhan had to recoordinate socio-politically in the face of a mass influx of refugees from the north. In order

to cope with such an urgent situation, an internal shift toward inter-village integration was adopted. Although the leader of the federation, Saroguk, spearheaded the move for an internal coalition and integration among the town states in Jinhan, Saroguk's rivals joined and competed with it fiercely. Nevertheless, Saroguk emerged triumphant as the final victor.

Thereafter, Jinhan was radically transformed. Saroguk became the leader of the Jinhan federation, but only as a mere member. As the federation was characterized by a horizontal structure, rather than a vertical hierarchy, external diplomacy was pursued under the banner of the Jinhan federation rather than that of Saroguk. Although all the town states reserved their state titles as their individual identities, they were not entitled to pursue unilateral diplomacy. In other words, despite the major and minor differences between them, the town states were basically all on an equal footing.

However, the Saroguk-led move for tighter integration resulted in the demarcation of a clear line between the pre-move and post-move era. Most political powers in the Jinhan federation were re-coordinated around Saroguk, which was no longer on an equal footing with its fellow town states and now ruled over them instead. Preexisting political power groups lost both their autonomy and the right to their own state titles. In so doing, Jinhan as a state title vanished forever into the mists of history, its position usurped by the newly born dynasty of Silla.

It appears that the Saroguk-centered move for Jinhan's internal integration was more or less brought to an end by King Namul (356-402), given that the state title of Silla first appeared during his reign. In short, King Namul's reign is safely assumed to indicate the starting period of the Silla dynasty. Such a fact is supported not only by the title, Silla, but also by the change in the title of its leader and various other phenomena.

However, not all of the Jinhan town states meekly joined Silla: Some became renegades. For example, Bulsaguk (不斯國) in Changnyeong, as one of the twelve town states of the Jinhan federation that adopted the new title of Bijabal in the mid-fourth century and emerged as one of Gaya's power groups. Meanwhile, Dongnoguk (瀆盧國) in Dongnae, Busan, which had previously belonged to Jinhan's fierce rival, Byeonhan, turned to Silla when Byeonhan joined Gaya. Such turmoil during this early stage of Silla's foundation proves that the transformation into Silla was not particularly smooth. Silla, having originated from Saroguk, now had to reform its internal system from the ground up in order to contain the turmoil. As an

obvious example, the highest member of the ruling elite was referred to as the *maripgan* (麻立干).

The highest ruling figure of Saroguk was called *isageum*, which means "tooth." (Interestingly, the word *imgeum*, which means king in Korean, originated from *isageum*.) Considering that one becomes older and wiser with age, an aged person was respected for his or her seniority. In other words, *isageum* in reference to tooth means a senior person. Accordingly, *isageum* was a title for the highest ruler, though not for the most powerful ruler who wielded strong political power. The term *maripgan* was different, however.

*Maripgan* is a composite of *marip* (麻立) and *gan* (干), with the former generally interpreted to originate from *maru* (宗), which means 'top' or 'chief', or *du* (head), while *gan* refers to the chieftain or chief, as the title *ga* (加) was used in Buyeo and Goguryeo. Accordingly, *maripgan* refers to a top chief or supreme chieftain or the king of kings. Because multiple *gan* were under his command, *maripgan* became the title for Silla's king. Thus, *gan* included not only the kingdom's capital, but also its local powers, which is why *maripgan* was appropriate for Silla that sat not only over the kingdom's capital, but also over its provinces. The fact that the title of the head of state had altered by the time of Silla's establishment proves this.

There are a few unequivocal cases that concretely show the different facets of the changes that took place during that time. Among them, significant changes in the exterior and interior features of tombs are noteworthy. During the mid-fourth century, a completely different kind of tomb was adopted. Based on its internal structure, this type of tomb is referred to as a wooden chamber tomb with stone mound (*jeokseok mokgwakbun*, 積石木槨墳).

A wooden chamber tomb with stone mound consists of a conventional wooden chamber, with flat-cut stones of constant thickness stacked in-between and on top of the tomb pit and the wooden chamber, all of which is covered over with earth to form a domed mound. There are various controversial theories concerning the genesis of the wooden chamber tomb with stone mound, such as the north-origin theory, the home-origin theory, and a hybrid theory, none of which is particularly convincing. Another feature of this type of tomb is that its mound is raised as high as possible to lend grandeur to the tomb's overall appearance. Hence, it is also referred to as an ancient tomb with a high dome mound (*gochong gobun*, 高塚古墳). Such a majestic type of tomb emerged in Yeongnam in the mid-fourth century, its



Fig 1. Interior of the Stone-mounded Wooden Chamber Tomb No. 41 in the Jjoksaem Zone, Gyeongju

internal structure varying depending on the region. For example, tombs in most regions other than the Gyeongju basin consist of a vertical stone-lined pit. Wooden chamber tombs with a stone mound, however, were erected only in and around Silla's capital, except in a small number of cases, which is why this type of tomb is thought to have been erected by Silla's founding members to display their status and identity. These tombs differ from other kinds of ancient tombs with a high dome mound due to their enormous size and clustered format, features that reflect the centralization of Silla's economic and political power. This also indicates that the kingdom's provinces were in a politically subordinate relationship to its capital.

In other words, the commencement of the *maripgan* era itself is based on economic power commensurate with realistic political power. Successive *maripgan* commissioned huge public works such as tombs, houses, fortresses, and shrines on a grandiose scale in order to flaunt their supremacy. They also dressed in a way that befitting their new-found status, and their lifestyle changed a great deal as well. Not only the exterior appearance of tombs erected posthumously for the ruler, but also the excavated burial goods found inside them provide clues from which to draw such a conclusion. Because the people of that time did not believe that life and death were two different states, but rather a continuum of one single state from one world to another, they liked to be buried together with elements of their lifestyle on earth. As such, the goods buried in the tombs of the *maripgan* and other rulers attest to their lavish lifestyle here on earth.

### The Development of Silla and Diplomacy with Former Qin

The facts introduced so far concern phenomena that occurred almost at the same time as the adoption of the state title of Silla. One more salient fact in this respect is the kingdom's appearance on the international stage under the name of Silla. The former title, Jinhan, was no longer employed either for internal purposes or for diplomatic purposes. This fact constitutes evidence that Silla usurped Jinhan at that time. In the late fourth century, Silla made two significant contacts with the newly emerged powerhouse of Former Qin (前秦).

Silla's first diplomatic contact with Former Qin took place in the year 377. At that time, King Namul sent his emissary to Former Qin, although

with Goguryeo's aid. This event is significant in that, although it did not leave any lasting impression on Former Qin itself, Silla's name was heard on the international stage for the first time. This foreshadows the approaching diplomatic era, especially for Silla. Because of its geographically disadvantageous location, Silla had to reach Former Qin via Goguryeo. However, this fact also shows that Silla had cultivated friendly relations with Goguryeo beforehand.

Silla dispatched an emissary to Former Qin for a second time in the year 382, five years after sending the first one. However, Goguryeo's help was yet to be spared. On this occasion, Silla's emissary was Widu (衛頭), whose dialogue with Fu Jian (符堅), Former Qin's then king, is preserved on record. Although intermittent, this dialogue deserves attention because it contains crucial information about Silla's internal trends and political situation. For the sake of expediency, here is an excerpt of the dialogue:

Fu Jian: "Your words indicate that Haedong's status has changed. Whatever has happened?"

Widu: "Just as was the case in China, where a new era ushered in a new king with a new name, so it is there (in Haedong). How could it (Haedong) be the same as before?"

There is an implication in this dialogue between the two men that Silla had recently experienced some upheaval: the reference to the altered titles, although rather unclear, is particularly noteworthy as contextually it could refer to the ruler's title, i.e. *maripgan*. Recalling that the new Silla dynasty had already made diplomatic contact with Former Qin, one might as well focus on what had changed since the diplomacy of the first emissary, that is the change of the ruler's title into *maripgan*. At that time, Silla's king was called *ruban* (樓寒), which may well have derived from a shortened form of *maripgan*. As such, the very first use of the term *maripgan* could fall somewhere between AD 377 and AD 382. To sum up, Silla clearly marked the transition to a new era by coining a new title for its ruler, *maripgan*.

*Maripgan* signifies that a ruler from a higher league than his predecessors, or *isageum*, had emerged. Thereafter, kingship was no longer alternated among multiple blood-related clans, but was inherited by a single clan. The retrospectively given surname of Kim is a case in point.

The foundation of Silla was spearheaded by the Kim clan. Accordingly,

although it was relatively weak at the beginning, it won the political power contest by building up its power base. In the background of the Kim family's final triumph lies the outstanding personal ability and military success of such family members as King Michu (昧鄒王), the first ruler to originate from the Kim family, and his father, Gudo (仇道). In addition, precious stones including gold and silver mined in regions they had secured militarily also contributed to their success. Prior to that, iron was also a valuable source of wealth. As such, groups in possession of quality iron ore and steel-making and smelting technology had the means to buy political influence with the wealth created by the development of such natural resources. Steel must also have played an indispensable part in the Bak and Seok clans' success in securing *isageum* status one after the other.

But once the steel-making and smelting technologies became commoditized to a certain level, they were no longer coveted, and the need for a better source of wealth arose. Hence, the era of gold and silver. The Kim clan secured gold and silver mines and reserved techniques for mining and working gold and silver. This fact is easily inferred from the fact that the Kim clan's surname denotes gold, that the wooden chamber tombs with stone mound were filled with huge amounts of gold goods, and that Silla was known for its abundant gold, among other things. However, where the Kim clan owned and ran their gold mines and how they acquired the technology to work the gold have not yet been ascertained. It appears, however, that the Kim clan lured gold workers from among the refugee group from the Lelang and Daifang Commanderies. The original names for Gimcheon (金泉) and Uiseong (義城), which are situated along the upper and middle reaches of the Nakdong River, are related to gold, and thus these areas are thought to have contained ample gold reserves. They are also areas that were conquered by Gudo, King Namul's father. Hence, the region is believed to have become the economic bedrock of the Kim clan.

To sum up, the Kim clan obtained advanced military technologies with the wealth furnished by gold and silver, and ultimately gained political power. Most of their advanced technologies were brought in from Goguryeo. Indeed, the Kim clan had proactively befriended and traded with the most powerful and advanced powerhouse of the region, which is why one cannot ignore Goguryeo's influence in any attempt to measure the growth and advancement of the Kim clan.

## Geopolitical Surroundings and Subordination to Goguryeo

At the time of Silla's birth, East Asia was in a volatile state. The Five Barbarians, northern nomadic tribes, swept into central China and destroyed the Jin dynasty. Survivors of the Jin dynasty migrated south and founded a new dynasty called Eastern Jin. In the north, meanwhile, the Five Barbarians founded successive new kingdoms, only to see them fail one after another in a vicious cycle. Hence, the period is often referred to as the period of the Sixteen Kingdoms of the Five Barbarians.

However, the Korean peninsula experienced fluctuations as well. When Goguryeo dismantled the Lelang and Daifang Commanderies to its south, its impact rippled as far as the Han River basin and further south. As a result, Baekje emerged from the move toward political integration in Mahan and became its dominant force by the end of 369. Meanwhile, Byeonhan, locked in competition with Jinhan, pursued its own course of integration, only to fail and subsist in the unintegrated state of Gaya.

Thus, as a new ruling order emerged on the Korean peninsula at the turn of the fourth century, each country began actively engaging in diplomatic warfare to further its own interests. The era was maturing when diplomacy took the center stage. Silla, a relatively inferior country at that time, could only sit idly by observing the situation. Meanwhile, Baekje made the first move to influence Gaya and sealed an alliance with Wae across the sea. However, Baekje also endeavored to lure Silla into its grand alliance because its ultimate goal was to challenge Goguryeo.

Much to Baekje's disappointment, however, Silla was increasingly inclined to favor Goguryeo, judging that it was more advantageous to take Goguryeo's side. Through earnest diplomacy with Goguryeo, Silla was keenly aware of it. From Goguryeo's standpoint, it wanted Silla as a well-positioned ally to keep the ever-expanding Baekje at bay. Goguryeo cultivated a particularly close relationship with the newly rising Kim clan, and shored up Silla by supplying it with strategic and tactical know-how as well as such products of advanced civilization as weapons, armor, and harnesses, while receiving financial resources like gold and silver in return. The mutual interests of the two countries coincided. Under such amicable circumstances, Silla could make its diplomatic debut with Former Qin. Meanwhile, Baekje consistently traded with Eastern Jin in south China, and actively sought the products of advanced civilization in its race against Goguryeo.

Once it had made diplomatic inroads into Goguryeo, Silla tied itself even more closely to Goguryeo. When King Gwanggaeto the Great acceded to Goguryeo's throne in the year 391, King Namul tried to cement his country's amicable relationship with Goguryeo by offering his brother-in-law, Silseong (實聖), who was also his strongest rival, as a hostage to Goguryeo. In short, King Namul wanted to kill two birds with one stone by cementing the relationship with Goguryeo on the one hand and by weakening his brother-in-law's power base by sending him away from the country on the other. However, Goguryeo demanded that King Namul pay a visit to acknowledge Silla's subordinate relationship with Goguryeo. But King Namul tactfully declined this demand: fully apprised of the internal political situation, it seems that King Namul tried to save at least some modicum of his country's dignity and independence.

King Namul exploited Goguryeo as much as possible to achieve his domestic and international goals, which resulted in a steady flow of products from the northern civilization into Silla. Such a fact has been confirmed through an examination of Silla's culture in the fourth and fifth centuries. In particular, as Gwanggaeto the Great sent his army to relieve Silla from a siege laid by Gaya and Wae, signs of Goguryeo's cultural influence in Silla became even more discernable.

It was around this time that King Gwanggaeto the Great sought to seize a first opportunity to avenge his grandfather, King Gogugwon (331–371), who had been murdered by Baekje during the latter's invasion. According to the Gwanggaeto Stele, Gwanggaeto the Great referred to Baekje as Baekjan (百殘), meaning "Baekje Thug," a derogatory nickname for Baekje, in his pursuit of revenge. Eventually, Gwanggaeto the Great crossed the Han River and closed in on the Baekje capital in the year 396. King Asin (392–405) of Baekje, promulgated his capitulation. As a token of Baekje's surrender, Gwanggaeto the Great received 1,000 male and female hostages, 1,000 rolls of hemp cloth, and 10 ministers, including the king's brother, and a pledge by Baekje to remain Goguryeo's eternal subordinate and returned. Goguryeo bargained with Baekje in order to prevent Baekje from recovering for the time being.

Deeply humiliated, Baekje blamed Silla and masterminded an attack on Silla by Gaya and Wae. Baekje was anyway targeting Silla due to the latter's ever closer association with Goguryeo. Baekje was unable to spearhead the attack because it had not yet recovered from the fiasco of 396, while Goguryeo was carefully observing the situation in the south even through



Fig 2. Gwanggaeto Stele, Ti'an, China

Gwanggaeto the Great's move to Pyeongyang. In the year 399, the allied forces of Gaya and Wae, commissioned by Baekje, successfully conquered Silla's capital, Geumseong. King Namul, faced with a sudden crisis, fled to the northern border and sent for Goguryeo's help. Accordingly, Gwanggaeto the Great dispatched a force of 50,000 infantry and cavalry to rescue Silla. The allies of Goguryeo and Silla retook Geumseong and defeated the allied Japanese and Gaya forces after pursuing them all the way to Jongbal Fortress (從拔城) in Imna Gaya.

Around the time of the relief of Silla by Goguryeo, several significant events occurred in Silla. First, Silla's king or *maegeum* (寐錦) visited Goguryeo in person to pay it tribute. *Maegeum* is the title for the Silla king inscribed on the Gwanggaeto Stele and is included in many other historical records. Although some view it

as being interchangeable with *isageum*, *maegeum* refers to the *maripgan* in general. King Namul declined Goguryeo's request for a direct visit at first, but not for long. In the end, the king went to Goguryeo to pledge his vassalhood to Goguryeo. Although it is generally considered that Namul was the Silla king who paid tribute to Goguryeo, given the overall context in the Gwanggaeto Stele inscription, it is more likely that it was his immediate successor, King Silseong. The Silla king's direct visit speaks volumes about the extent of Goguryeo's influence over Silla. Needless to say, Goguryeo's culture also flooded into Silla.

Second, in the aftermath of Goguryeo's rescue operation, Goguryeo troops were stationed in strategically key locations. An agreement on Goguryeo's military presence in Silla appears to have been sealed between the two countries during the Silla king's sojourn in Goguryeo. This fact alone points to Silla's semi-permanent subjugation by Goguryeo, and is supported by the use of the term "subjugated people" (*songmin*, 屬民) on the Gwanggaeto Stele. That Goguryeo crowned Silseong, its hostage for ten long years, rather than one of King Namul's three sons, and then replaced King Silseong with King Nulji ten years later, demonstrates how much Goguryeo interfered in Silla's internal affairs. From the turn of the fifth century, Silla was politically shackled under Goguryeo's control for the

foreseeable future. However, Silla could afford to take its time preparing a springboard to growth under Goguryeo's patronage.

Third, the border between Silla and Gaya was redefined along the Nakdong River. Bijabal of Changnyeong, one of the seven polities of Gaya, used to occupy territory on the eastern side of the Nakdong River, which suggests that the river did not divide Silla and Gaya until the allied forces of Goguryeo and Silla defeated those of Gaya and Wa. In other words, the fact that Goguryeo helped to extricate Silla from a crisis and stationed its troops there contributed to Silla's growth—until, that is, Goguryeo's officious interference began to impede Silla's growth. Silla gradually began to resist Goguryeo's interference while constantly pursuing independence. The first symbolic act of resistance was Silla's bold move to rescue Bokho, King Nulji's brother, who was being held as a hostage by Goguryeo.

### The Alliance between Silla and Baekje and Silla's Quest for Independence

Silla had been subordinated to Goguryeo's strong influence since Gwanggaeto the Great's army drove out the allied forces of Gaya and Wae in 400. Although a major part of Goguryeo's army withdrew immediately upon achieving its goal, some troops remained stationed in strategically important locations, including Silla's capital. With a military presence firmly established in Silla's territory, Goguryeo was able to demand a significant financial return and meddle in Silla's internal affairs. Although having meekly complied with Goguryeo's demands at the beginning, Silla began resisting Goguryeo's unreasonable demands. Goguryeo's manipulative provocation of a dispute in a bid to tighten its control over Silla did not help either. Tension surfaced eventually in the form of a feud between King Silseong and the first son of King Namul. The two were distant relatives (roughly uncle and nephew), as well as father-in-law and son-in-law. After the failure of an attempt to remove Nulji with Goguryeo's assistance, Silseong ended up being dethroned, whereupon Nulji ascended to the Silla throne with Goguryeo's assistance.

King Nulji, owing his throne to Goguryeo, initially tried to maintain the status quo in terms of Silla's relationship with Goguryeo. However, as he eventually came to the conclusion that Goguryeo represented an obstacle to

Silla's growth, King Nulji began his quest for independence from Goguryeo's influence. King Nulji was not as gullible as Goguryeo might have expected. No sooner had he been crowned than he made a decisive attempt to repatriate two of his brothers who had been held hostage abroad for ten years. At that time, it was practically impossible to have them returned via normal diplomatic routes. As such, King Nulji resorted to an unusual method. An individual named Bak Jesang (朴堤上) was picked to execute King Nulji's rescue plan. There is some controversy over whether he was born in Wanggyeong or Yangsan or somewhere else, although Ulsan is his most likely birthplace according to recent opinions. Bak Jesang rescued Bokho from Goguryeo first, and then successfully rescued Misaheun from Wae, although, unfortunately, he was caught and killed there.

What is questionable, though, is that despite being subordinated to Goguryeo, Silla did not pursue the normal diplomatic procedures to bring back Bokho, which suggests that a problem between the two countries must have been simmering beneath the surface. Because Goguryeo had the upperhand at that time, Silla should have dealt with its request through the normal diplomatic channels, but in the absence of such an option, it resorted to an abnormal method. This suggests that the relationship between Silla and Goguryeo was far from perfect.

At that time, a faction in favor of Silseong and another in favor of Nulji were in confrontation with each other in Goguryeo as well. The faction opposed to the normal diplomatic route frowned upon Nulji's ascension to the throne, which is why King Nulji employed Bak Jesang to execute his rescue operation. It was successful thanks to Goguryeo's internal division in favor of King Nulji. As a result of such experiences, King Nulji came to terms with the idea that independence was essential, and realized that the only way to emerge from Goguryeo's shadow was to approach Baekje. Goguryeo's southward relocation of its capital to Pyeongyang in the year 427 provided the crucial impetus at exactly the right moment. Baekje, under threat from mighty Goguryeo's closer proximity, approached Silla first, while Silla, desperate to deal with Goguryeo, gladly agreed to a pact with Baekje against Goguryeo in 433.

As we have seen, the fledgling dynasty of Silla, having only just made its debut on the international stage, was accumulating experience that would assist its later development. In order to weather both minor and major crises on the international stage, a small country like Silla would have needed to

exploit the regional superpowers to its advantage. Around the mid-sixth century, during the reign of King Jinheung, Silla antagonized both Baekje and Goguryeo at the same time and succeeded in defeating both foes, perhaps on the back of experiences accumulated throughout its earlier history.

### The Breakdown of Diplomatic Ties with Goguryeo and Other Changes

Silla was not in a position to antagonize Goguryeo immediately after forming a pact with Baekje. Instead, Silla maintained a cunning two-faced diplomatic position between Goguryeo and Baekje because perfect timing was required to declare its liberation from Goguryeo's control without breaking off their friendly relations. Silla took dual measures to prepare for unpredictable oppression on the one hand and to covertly cultivate friendly ties with Baekje on the other. However, Silla's fundamental policy was to move closer to Baekje and distance itself from Goguryeo.

The tension between Silla and Goguryeo began to intensify, as hostile exchanges and confrontations began taking place around border areas rather than at the central government level. Then, in 450 (34th year of King Nulji's reign), a border officer (*hyeonjang*, 邊將) of Goguryeo strayed into Siljik (present-day Samcheok) to hunt and was killed by Samjik, the Silla lord of Haseulla Castle (in today's Gangneung). The specific identities of the border officer and the castle lord are vague, but they were probably local gentry rather than officials from the respective central governments. In other words, the incident was between the gentry of the respective precincts. Nevertheless, Goguryeo took military action to avenge Silla's offense, although the incident did not escalate because Silla issued a timely apology. After this incident, however, the tension and confrontations between the two countries gradually intensified, until Goguryeo suddenly attacked Silla's northern border in 454 (38th year of King Nulji's reign). To make matters worse, when Goguryeo attacked Baekje in the following year, Silla sent its troops to help Baekje to defend itself against Goguryeo. This unveiled hostility was the final nail in the coffin of the already faltering relations between Silla and Goguryeo.

However, the *Nihon shoki* records that at some point before 464, a 100-strong unit of Goguryeo troops had been stationed in Silla's capital,

though it is not clear when they arrived. It is clear that after Goguryeo successfully concluded its foray into the south, it left behind a part of its army in Silla, although the number of soldiers must have varied. Another possible scenario is that once King Nulji had been enthroned, Goguryeo withdrew its stationed soldiers, but then returned them in the wake of a later incident. The number of Goguryeo soldiers was very small by 464, and thus could not have been expected to help Silla to defend itself against an attack. Rather, it is more likely that the presence of a small force was justified by military advisors whose real purpose was to monitor Silla's internal situation. Or, in the same vein, the tiny force was very likely the result of a compromise struck between the two countries after a military collision amid rising tension in 455. According to the *Samguk sagi*, Wae had invaded Silla's borders on a large scale for a number years before 464. Silla may have enlisted help from Goguryeo to deal with acts of aggression by Wae. At any rate, it is certain that a Goguryeo force was stationed in the Silla capital, suggesting that relations between the two countries had not completely broken down despite many twists and turns.

Eventually, however, the 100 Goguryeo soldiers were slaughtered in a surprise attack by Silla in 464. This incident is recorded in the *Nihon shoki* almost in the manner of a fable. A Goguryeo soldier on his way home for a period of leave is said to have divulged a state secret to his Silla guide to the effect that the time was nearing for Goguryeo to invade Silla. Upon hearing this, the guide returned to Silla to inform his rulers of the state secret he had gleaned from the Goguryeo soldier. Silla launched a preemptive attack, slaughtering Goguryeo's soldiers. A survivor escaped and informed his country of this atrocity. Thus, the two countries became sworn enemies.

Just because the story was narrated in the style of a fable does not necessarily mean that it is entirely fictional. Indeed, significant parts of the story appear to be factual. The mood of those days is well documented in the *Samguk sagi*. After Silla took preemptive action against the possibility of a Goguryeo invasion, the two countries, although they did not entirely cut their ties, were unable to transcend the incident and repudiated each other. Silla became preoccupied with the possibility of an invasion by Goguryeo and sought to turn a crisis into an opportunity, not only to prepare for Goguryeo's impending invasion, but also to repair its overall system and establish a new ruling order.

# 2

## Formation and Government of a Regional Polity Administration System

### Formation of the Yukbu (Six Regional Polities)

As Silla took its time emerging through the integration of Jinhan's various individual polities, its ruling order could not be established as an integrated system overnight. As the preexisting order was alive and well, it took a significant amount of time to establish the new ruling system alone. Even the regions that had been absorbed into Silla's territory preserved their old systems, at least in part, although they were deprived of their independence. Accordingly, it took time-consuming transitional processes to perfect the centralized ruling system.

Saroguk embodied a structure internally composed of several *eumnak* or towns. Among them the town state assumed political leadership. Such an internal structure had been undergoing fundamental changes since the foundation of the Silla Kingdom, as the towns were already being reorganized in Saroguk itself in parallel with its pursuit of consolidation with Jinhan's integration. A *bu* (部) or polity was an organization newly established through the reorganization of the towns.

The term *bu* was borrowed from Goguryeo, which had exercised considerable political and cultural influence as an advanced country, as opposed to a fledgling state like Silla. In fact, Saroguk's towns were not indiscriminately renamed as regional polities. The transition of Saroguk

hegemony from the Seok to the Kim clan proceeded in a similar manner. The regional polities emerged as the result of a ground-up reorganization of several towns. As such, some regional polities turned out to be considerably larger than the preexisting towns in terms of population and material assets, whereas others were merged into a province and vanished; and some towns constituted an entire regional polity in themselves. As a result, the number of preexisting towns and the number of newly organized regional polities were not necessarily the same. Moreover, because of the reformation process, the regional polity was an organization with fundamentally different characteristics from a town. For example, a regional polity had a more refined rank classification than a town or village, which translated into proportionally less communality than the latter.

As to the date of the formation of the regional polities, opinions are divided into a school of thought in favor of the *isageum* era and another in favor of the *maripgan* era. The latter time opinion is more widely accepted, however, because the transition from towns to regional polities itself implies that changes took place in the internal structure, differentiating it from the immediately preceding period. In short, Silla's emergence amounts to the replacement of towns by regional polities.

The regional polity as Silla's collective ruling system was not addressed as *bu* per unit as soon as the system was put in place. It was not until a significant amount of time had passed that the unit was given a proper title. As an early sixth century epigraph proves, an identical group is referred to sometimes by the use of *bu* and sometimes without it. This inconsistent usage suggests that the title of the system was not firmly established. Indeed, it is conjectured that the term *bu* only began to be used consistently from the late fifth century. A practical reason for using this Goguryeo term is that Silla's administrative units had functions similar to those of Goguryeo's five regional polities.

However, despite the similarities, the two systems of Silla and Goguryeo were quite different from each other in terms of their size, structure, and operation. Each of Goguryeo's five regional polities matched the scale of a *na* (那) or *naguk* (那國), Goguryeo's town state. For instance, Gyerubu, which was home to some of Goguryeo's kings, was an independent state. This means that a *na* (*bu*) also comprised several towns. In comparison, Silla's Yukbu (six regional polities) ultimately amounted more or less to Saroguk in terms of scale. In other words, as opposed to Goguryeo's five regional polities, Silla's entire Yukbu system was no larger than one Goguryeo regional polity. Such a disparity fed into what brought about

fundamental differences between the two countries in terms of their ruling structure and political operations.

Silla's Yukbu included Tak (喙 or 梁), Satak (沙喙 or 沙梁), Motak (牟喙 or 牟梁), Bonpi (本彼 or 本波), Seupbi (習比 or 斯彼), and Hangi (漢祇 or 漢只) at the initial completion. However, there are two schools of thought here as well: one in favor of six founding regional polities, the other in favor of three initial founding regional polities that were later sub-divided to create additional regional polities. According to the latter, more recent, school of thought, the three regional polities grew in size in the course of fierce competition between them, with the most powerful regional polities splitting into two or three regional polities, thus resulting in the creation of the Yukbu (six regional polities). Meanwhile, the former school of thought is based on the idea that Saroguk's six towns were turned into Yukbu at the very beginning. However, these theorists do not bother to clarify the differences between towns and regional polities or their transitional process. As such, this theory definitively concludes that there was scarcely any reorganization with regard to internal or external integration in the transition from Saroguk to Silla. It seems out of the question, however, that an internal change ensured the foundation of what was basically a new country, much less the transition from six towns to the Yukbu (six regional polities).

Meanwhile, the latter theory raises a very questionable point about the former theory. Of particular interest is the fact that the latter focuses on the regional polities's dynamism and independence. Regional polities were not equal to one another because of their strong political independence. In the course of Silla's evolution, Saroguk's towns converged into three large regional polities, all of which had different rights and structures. As they competed for military success against each other, the spoils of war were awarded to the three regional polities in a discriminatory way, thereby further widening the already yawning gap between successful and less successful regional polities in terms of their scale and structure. As this tendency intensified even more over time, a superior regional polity like Tak split into smaller units under its own weight, resulting in the formation of Yukbu.

The former school of thought is a pre-existing, long-held theory, while the latter is a new theory based on new epigraphs. The conclusions of these two conflicting theories have not yet been inferred, but considering the importance of the regional polities from this time onward, a more profound debate over the course of their establishment, characteristics, and functions is in order.

## Regional Polity Administration System and Conference Body

The Yukbu or six regional polities are collectively referred to as the rulers' community. Because the *bu* were organizational bodies that emerged from the integration of the final victors in Saroguk, this is a correct viewpoint. Not only Saroguk's rulers, but also the local gentry who were assimilated into the central government belonged to the Yukbu. And because the regional polities emerged out of the reorganization of Saroguk's internal system, the preexisting system was altered accordingly in the process.

*Ganje* (干制) was the means of reorganization of the ruling class. The gentry who constituted the ruling class in the regional polities were uniformly invested with the title *gan* (including *gangun* [干群] subdivided from *gan*). Because the gentry in the kingdom's capital were ranked already with regard to the size and superiority of their power base, the title *gan* was not conferred indiscriminately. This suggests that the title of *gan* was to some extent classified according to its bearer's rank. The later title of *gyeongwi* (京位), which can be translated as capital officer, awarded to constituents of the kingdom's capital, was based on this rank classification.

Adoption of the *gan* system meant that regular reforms had already proceeded in the rulers' communities. Marking a fundamental change from the past, this amounts to a seismic change along with the establishment of the provincial system. It was the *maripgan* who represented the ruling gentry, now coordinated by the *gan* system, as their chief or head *gan*. Saroguk was now prepared with its foothold to function as Silla's capital. Of course, it took a while before Saroguk started functioning as Silla's capital rather than as a mere town state. But it was a start. The establishment of the kingdom's capital entailed the assumption that the provinces existed as the surroundings of the kingdom's capital.

The title *gan* was given not only to gentry who belonged to the six *bu*, but also to local gentry. This is because, as the power bases for independent local polities had not yet been completely deconstructed, it was too early to overpower them. Therefore, instead of confronting the local gentry, Silla acknowledged their power bases to some extent by conferring the title of *gan* upon them. This was also the progenitor of the *oewi* (外位)—which literally means outer officer—for the provincial population.

Hence, in the beginning the *gan* in the capital and those in the provinces were hardly distinguished from each other. This contrasts with the later

discriminatory class system of the sixth century: Accordingly, gentry in the capital were given the title of *gyeongwi* (capital officer), whereas those of the regional polities were given the title of *oewi* (outer officer). Then, the central government tightened its grip over the provinces by weakening the provincial power bases.

To recap, there was scarcely any discrimination between the provincial population and the population in the capital in the early days of the *maripgan*. The Jinhan order was not yet completely extinct, which was no surprise for Silla as it was still struggling to centralize its power. However, as its rule over the regional polities intensified, the power bases of the provincial gentry were gradually eroded and they became discriminated against.

At this point the rank and status of the *maripgan* were not absolute. In fact, the *maripgan* was the national king of Silla and the chieftain of Tak-bu or Tak regional polity; in other words, he was simply the highest-ranking of the provincial chieftains of the Yukbu, and not an absolute ruler. Crucial state affairs were resolved at a conference attended by the chieftains of the regional polities and equally powerful gentry. Because the Yukbu were not on an equal footing, the number of representatives from each regional polity varied in proportion to each regional polity's rank. Many, including the chieftain, of a powerful and superior regional polities attended the conference, whereas only a few came from powerless and inferior regional polities, and this imbalance inevitably increased over time. Since the conference was composed of the ruling class, called *gan*, in reference to Jegahoeui (諸加會議)—literally, Conference of All Ga's (i.e. chieftains)—in Goguryeo and Buyeo, Silla's conference is analogously referred to as the Gangunhoeui (干群會議, Conference of the Group of Gan) or the Jeganhoeui (諸干會議, Conference of All Gan). The *maripgan* presided over the conference.

Therefore, in general the ruling order in the conference body composed of provincial attendants is referred to as the *bu* or regional polity system. The conference body was the core of the provincial system because all important state affairs were resolved through the conference. In reality, this system was a vestige of the bygone era's communalism.

Attendance at the conference was not restricted only to the population in the capital. Provincial gentry with the *gan* title were eligible to attend the conference at least officially. Thus they were able to involve themselves in central politics from the beginning, although certain barriers including distance from the capital prevented them from frequently attending all the

conferences in person. Particularly contentious issues including diplomatic matters and mobilization for war were determined at the conference, with the provincial gentry also in attendance, since such affairs also greatly affected the provincial population. For example, as King Nulji looked for a strategy to rescue his two brothers held hostage in Goguryeo and Wae, he chose Bak Jesang as the optimal candidate to execute his rescue operation in a conference attended by gentry from the outermost border regions. The fact that provincial gentry with the *gan* title were also qualified to attend Silla's central political conferences indicates that Jinhan's ruling axiom had not been abandoned completely.

At this stage of the provincial system, neither a public office nor a public post had been assigned to deal with a specific agenda, although there were public organizations in their early forms. Designed to deal with actual work and display the internal hierarchy, these were in essence a combination of public posts and public ranks. But not all the regional polities enjoyed equal standing. Especially Tak-bu, whose head was the *maripgan*, and Satak-bu, whose head was the *galmunwang* (葛文王), consisted of many more gentry worthy of the *gan* title among their populous ruling class. Naturally their assistant staff members in charge of actual work were comparably more numerous. Therefore, a unitary bureaucracy centering around the national king was not yet established in the *maripgan* period; instead, a rudimentary bureaucracy in diverse forms existed in each province, and thus the affairs of each individual regional polity were determined and executed regional polity at the provincial level.

The ruling class in the *maripgan* period was divided into one group responsible for making decisions and another group for executing them. In general, the *gan* belonged to the former while the *nama* (奈麻) belonged to the latter. It was under this structure that any given case was collectively determined and executed, and this was a major feature of the provincial system originating from the residual communality by which any given agenda could be collectively handled due to the lack of an established exclusive and supreme rank.

Because every matter came under the system's responsibility, the *maripgan*'s rank as presider over the conference was lower than that of later Silla kings. As a mere chieftain of a regional polity himself, the *maripgan* was always undercut by the counterweight of the other regional polities, and all the more so in the case of the head of another regional polity of equal standing, Satak-bu, which is attested by the use of a special term for the head

of Yukbu, *galmunwang* (galmun king). This is also the reason for the claim that the six-province system was run under the dual authority of the *maripgan* and the *galmunwang*. Besides, there were a number of *galmunwang*, including the head of Satak-bu, during the *maripgan* period. For example, the king's father in-law and younger brothers were also called *galmunwang*, although the title borne by these kinds of holders was not hereditary, but symbolic, and was held for one generation only. The *galmunwang* title given to the head of Satak-bu was only hereditary, which reflects his power. The *galmunwang* policy was closely linked to the emerging phenomenon of lineage classification. The concept of a royal family in possession of exclusive rights for a hereditary crown began to take root.

### Government of the Regional Polity Administration System and Its Limits

The pivot of political operation in the *maripgan* period was the Yukbu System. The six regional polities, with their strong autonomous character, played the vital role of setting the direction for overall state policies. Critical state matters were resolved and implemented at a conference composed of gentry from the Yukbu, including their chieftains.

However, the six regional polities were not all equal. They differed in terms of the composition of their population and their size. By and large, there were two groups: one characterized by power and superiority, the other by powerlessness and inferiority. Tak-bu and Satak-bu belonged to the former group, while the other four regional polities belonged to the latter, each with more or less equal authority. The gap between these two groups widened over time. In this sense, the provincial system was only sustainable in the short run. While the two superior regional polities raced ahead, attracting ever more political power, the other four regional polities lagged ever farther behind. Throughout the fifth century, the system tottered permanently on the brink of extinction.

Another factor working against the long-term survival of the provincial system can be seen in its internal composition. Each of the six regional polities was composed of small, motley groups of disparate blood lines. Such small groups are even opined to have been warrant regional polities within a province. Each of the six regional polities appears to have been a communal group based on substantial blood ties, with an autonomous

character, but in reality it was an organizational body composed of small, motley groups with disparate political positions and orientations. This is because the regional polities consisted of numerous small groups on the basis of one *eumnak*. Even small groups were subdivided into mainstream and non-mainstream groups, with significantly different levels of superiority between them. In other words, intensive competition was the norm even at the level of the small-scale groups. This situation is clearly demonstrated by an episode in which two factions in one regional polity disputed with and confronted each other over the choice of a wife for Prince Jima (祇摩), the son of King Pasa (婆娑).

Therefore, the regional polity was, from the outset, an organization with a brittle structure. The interior of each regional polity was based on a classified ranking system. Even a group appearing to be from one blood lineage proved to be composed of multiple branches of a family upon closer examination. And these family branches were locked in sharp rivalry. The fight for the crown between King Namul's direct descendants and King Silseong is a case in point. These two Kims belonged to one Kim clan and were close relatives. As the lineage classification ran its course, acrimonious confrontations and disputes arose even within an identical blood lineage due to differences in their political orientation.

How small groups of lineages constituting a regional polity came to branch out can also be inferred from their internal marriage trend. There were two marriage tendencies before and after the commencement of the *maripgan* period: one type of marriage took place between different lineage groups (i.e. exogamous), the other within the same lineage (i.e. endogamous). These two mutually contrasting tendencies were already prevalent before the *maripgan* era. Thus, there must have been internally embedded conflicts of interest and strong reasons for the existence of two distinct marriage tendencies within and outside the same lineage. If two mutually contrasting marriage tendencies in one lineage group were steadfastly practiced, they must have been formalized as unchangeable customs or traditions. Such mutually incompatible customs led to mutually exclusive relationships and ultimately to dichotomic political orientations. Marriage customs under the later Bone Rank System evolved from this trend. Such conditions can be inferred from the marital relations of national kings during the *maripgan* era. The actual conditions prior to and after the enthronement of King Namul, who ushered in the *maripgan* era, illustrate

such a situation.

It was during the time of Gudo (King Namul's grandfather) that the Kim clan succeeded in firmly establishing its political base. He had another son, Daeseoji (大西知), King Silseong's father, as well as Michu (味鄒) and Malgu (末仇). However, *Samguk sagi* records Daeseoji's origin only to the extent of revealing his progenitor, Alji (闕智), without making any concrete reference to his lineage. By contrast, *Samguk yusa* refers to Daeseoji as King Michu's brother. The overall situation, in which Silseong was sent as a hostage to Goguryeo for ten years, and yet still succeeded King Namul—although with Goguryeo's aid—upon his return home, suggests that he must have been King Namul's not-so-distant relative. Accordingly, the record in *Samguk yusa*, which refers to Daeseoji as Namul's cousin, seems more valid. It indicates that Gudo was grandfather not only to King Namul, but also to King Silseong. In other words, Gudo had three sons, namely, *Isageum* Michu, Namul's father, Malgu, and Silseong's father, Daeseoji.

While the two siblings, Michu and Daeseoji, were married to women from the Seok family, Malgu was married to another Kim, Lady Hyurye (休禮). Although details of the blood relationship between Malgu and Hyurye (休禮) are not given, the marriage was a case of inbreeding. Michu had no male child, but two female children, one of whom married Namul, and the other, Silseong. Because they were all cousins, these were extremely incestuous relationships. As such, it appears that an incestuous marriage custom was initiated by Malgu.

The first son of King Namul, Nulji, was married to a daughter of King Silseong, his political rival. They were second cousins. Nulji's son, Jabi, was married to a daughter of Misaheun (未斯欣). Because Misaheun was King Namul's third son and Nulji's younger brother, his marriage was incestuous as well. Jabi's son, Soji, took Seonhye (善兮), the daughter of Naesuk (乃宿), as his wife. Naesuk was an ibeolchan, the highest-ranking official in Silla, and was the same individual referred to as Ingsuk (仍宿), the grandfather of Geochilbu (居柒夫), who had published *Guksa* (國史, National history) during the reign of King Jinheung. This means that Seonhye and Geochilbu's father, Mullyeok (勿力), were siblings. Naesuk (a.k.a. Ingsuk) was King Namul's great-grandson and Geochilbu, Naesuk's grandson. Since Soji was also King Namul's grandson by three generations, he was Naesuk's fraternal relative and second cousin at the farthest remove. Accordingly, the marriage between Soji and Seonhye was incestuous as well.

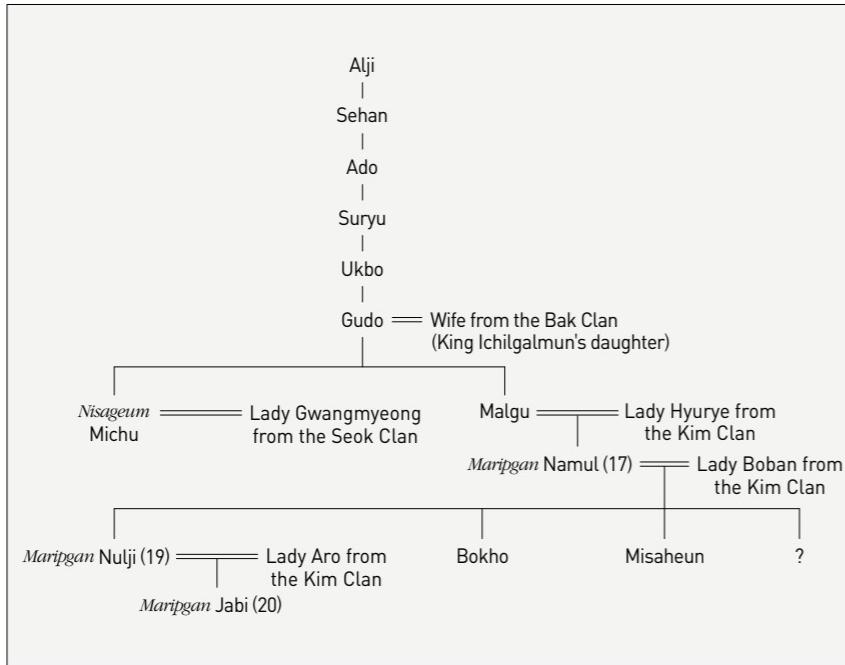


Fig 3. Genealogy chart of King Namul's lineage

In other words, all of the direct descendants of King Namul, who climbed the ranks to become *maripgan*, are confirmed to have been married incestuously to their third cousins or even closer cousins, almost without exception. For the national king in the *maripgan* period, an incestuous marriage appears to have been fixed as some sort of principle. This tendency toward incestuous marriage contrasts starkly with the early mid-period of Silla's history. All three kings including King Jijeung, who ascended to the throne through political confrontation with King Soji, his son King Beopheung, and his successor King Jinheung were married to a woman not of Kim descent but rather of Bak descent. Marriage to women of the Bak family for three consecutive generations indicates that marriage between the two families became a custom in that lineage. Thus, King Soji and King Jijeung were close relatives. But the two lineages are differentiated from each other in terms of marriage tendency. This reflects the fact that the political positions and orientations of the two lineages were different and that the lineage classification proceeded to the extent of differentiating a direct lineage from a collateral lineage.

Such a tendency began to surface even before the reign of King Namul.

Gudo, King Namul's grandfather, was married to a wife of Bak descent while his two uncles, King Michu and Daeseoji, were married to wives of Seok descent. At that time, so-called 'outbreeding' (i.e. exogamous marriage) was the general tendency. By contrast, their father Malguman was married to a wife of Kim descent, and the tendency toward inbred marriage endured through the generations. Daeseoji's son Silseong married his cousin, King Michu's daughter, incestuously, just as King Namul had done.

These marriage records confirm that marriage within the ruling class around the *maripgan* era was both incestuous and exogamous on the whole. Originally, the latter tendency was the norm because marriage with a spouse from outside one's lineage was also used as a means of preserving one's power base. On the other hand, incestuous marriage became established as the mainstream marriage custom for the royal family in the *maripgan* era after Malgu. For example, among the Kim family lineages, the branch that inherited the rank of *maripgan* practiced incestuous marriage extensively. At that time, the incestuous marriages of King Namul's direct descendants were exceptional cases done only under extenuating circumstances. Also, the incestuous marital custom was possible because the royal family no longer needed marriage with other families as a means of strengthening its power base. In other words, the Kim family, having initiated the *maripgan* era, could boast of its legitimacy on the basis of its stalwart political base, while other lineages in the Kim clan pursued exogamous marriages with other families. These lineages, being mostly families that had branched out from the royal family, needed to form alliances with other clans to gain the upperhand in internal conflicts with their fellow lineages, and this need to be materialized in the form of exogamous marriage.

Instability and the rapidly progressing lineage classification within the ruling class in the *maripgan* era already contained explosive factors that would eventually be detonated by contact with an external stimulus. This direct stimulus was provided by the provincial reforms prompted by the repudiation of Silla's relationship with Goguryeo.

## 3

## Commencement of Local Governance and Change of Governance System

### Reorganization of the Provinces

Silla was a country with a large territory with Saroguk at its center. The moment Silla was established, however, the Saro area began functioning as the kingdom's capital. Indeed, Saro was the seat of Silla's core political power and was also referred to as Seorabeol or Seobeo, from which the name Seoul derives referring to the national capital today.

The establishment of the kingdom's capital naturally implies the presence of surrounding provinces. Silla as a country consisted of a capital and provinces. The autonomous town states of the preceding Jinhan era served as the base unit of the newly established provinces and were gradually losing their independent character as they were brought under Silla's dominion. Many kinds of restrictions were imposed as the mutual relationship changed from one of mutual equality to one of ruler-and-ruled. State names that expressed identity were either used as a geographical name for a local area or were replaced with a completely different name. In cases where the state name was preserved, it simply meant that the preexisting ruling structure had not yet been completely dismantled. Although partially eclipsed, the provincial gentry were able to cling onto a significant portion of their power. By contrast, replacement with another geographical name meant that the province had already experienced the forced dismantlement

of its power base. The likely cause of such deconstruction is that the local gentry were uncooperative with or rebelled against the central government. In this case, a new ruling power compliant with Silla's rule was installed in place of the older one. Through such processes, Silla's overall territory was being constantly reformed and reorganized.

Silla's central government adopted two methods of reorganizing its territory. One was *chonje* (村制), or the *chon* system, the other was *ganje* (干制), that is to say, the *gan* system mentioned earlier. The word *chon* (村) originated from the reference to an area surrounded by defensive walls during the Three Kingdoms Period in third-century China. Goguryeo borrowed the concept behind the word and used it to refer to a group of dwellings as chollak. Later, Silla imported the *chonje* system via Goguryeo, but initially used it to refer to a special central political base. Thus, whereas Goguryeo's *chon* was a sub-unit of a provincial administration's basic unit, namely, *seong* (城) or fortress, Silla's *chon* referred to a large-scale unit like Goguryeo's *seong*, or was equivalent to the basic unit for the preexisting town state, namely, *eumnak*. This has been inferred from the fact that a *chon* was set up as a basic unit of provincial administration to which, after the sixth century, a governor would have been appointed and dispatched. Thereafter, however, the term *chon* was employed more widely; for example, it was also used to refer to a group of natural dwellings under an *eumnak*. This is the reason why the use of *chon* broadened from referring to a power base in the beginning to referring to a smaller unit later on. Incidentally, the term *chonje* did not apply to the whole region all at the same time but was initially applied to areas that could be reorganized and then gradually to wider areas. The title of *gan* was awarded to local gentry of the areas set up as *chon*.

As mentioned above, *gan* was a title given not only to gentry in the kingdom's capital but also to provincial gentry. In other words, among provincial gentry, only those based in areas that had been reorganized into *chon* were publicly acknowledged for their ruling authority. It was known, at least at the beginning, that the provincial gentry with the title of *gan* were treated as being on a par with the gentry of the kingdom's capital. The *maripgan* granted the provincial gentry all kinds of clothes and accessories, so called "ostentatious" products, as realistic material proof of their *gan* status. In the tombs found in each area where a member of the provincial gentry class was thought to have been a master, headwear, jewelry such as earrings and necklaces, waist belts, and various swords symbolizing

military authority have all been excavated. These grave goods are not much different from those found in the jeokseok mokgwakbun (積石木槨塚, wooden chamber tombs with stone mound) in the capital area. They do not match the scale, quality, and quantity of the top rank in the kingdom's capital, but those of second rank. This constitutes material evidence that the local gentry were treated with quite a high degree of respect, although not as highly as that accorded to the royal family.

In the meantime, the tombs in each province display similar sizes and characteristics, and a certain degree of uniformity. This means that even ostentatious material products intended to guarantee the rank of the provincial gentry were also almost uniformly vouchsafed, except for a few disparities pertaining to the provincial power's scale and political importance, and the member of the gentry's degree of loyalty. Likewise, those with the title of *gan* went through various forms of classification as the new ranks were established. This resembles an earlier form of the later *oewjje* (外位制), or outer officer system.

### Indirect Rule and Its Method

Because the provincial gentry received the title of *gan* according to *chon* as a standard unit, their title was in the following form: 'such and such' *chongan*. A member of the local gentry referred to as *chongan* pledged allegiance to the central government and in return was bestowed with the authority to rule over the relevant region. Thereafter, members of the local gentry wielded their authority over their provincial populations, not with their traditional authority but rather with actual power granted by the central government. Their sphere of governance was not limited to the concerned *chon*, but extended to the territorial extent over which they had traditionally exerted their authority. In fact, the *chon* functioned as a power base in much the same way as the state capitals of the town states had done before they were all absorbed by Silla. As a result, other preexisting *eumnak* or towns were placed under the *chongan*'s rule. Indeed because the *chongan* could influence other towns from its base, having been authorized by the central government, the central government could exercise its rule over the provinces through the *chongan* which were acting as its agents. That Silla granted the provincial gentry their town-state-era authority was a product of

the deal between the central and provincial powers.

As Silla's ruling system took shape, the number of objects merged into *chon* and the number of gentry given the title of *gan* increased, which means that the number of gentry called *chongan* increased as well. The central government extended its rule deeper into the *chollak* by increasing the number of *chongan* through an emulation of loyalty among the provincial gentry.

Each *chon* created a certain organizational system centered around its *chongan*. The governance of the *chon* was handled by an organizational body attended by a group of influential local figures, which later became the predecessor of the *chonsa* (村司, town offices), just as, under the conference of the provincial (*bu*) system local affairs were discussed at the conference attended by influential local gentry. Although not yet fully formed, a rudimentary administrative structure staffed by functionaries was in place, too. Based on the case of Goguryeo, staff up to a certain rank appear to have been approved by the central government.

Because the governing system of the central government was too immature and unsystematized even to appoint and dispatch its own governor to the provinces, it resorted to ruling the provinces by making the most of the internal organization within the *chollak*. Although the local gentry had lost their independence, they did not lose their political base completely. In exchange for a guarantee of a reasonable degree of autonomy, the provincial gentry submitted a certain amount of tribute to the central government. The central government ruled the provinces by receiving tribute from the local gentry instead of posting a governor to execute royal commands, a method of provincial governance known as indirect rule. Indirect rule is a method of governance that is generally used during a period of transition when the centralization of power has yet to be completed.

Even under indirect rule, control and management by the central government were not evenly applied to the entire region. For example, the local powers had different ranks and modes of existence from one another. In one case, some provinces were granted almost complete autonomy by submitting tribute that showed all the formalities of vassalage. In another case, the original power groups were relocated while in other cases new power groups were transplanted. In yet another case, some preexisting gentry preserved their power base almost unchanged.

The central government was highly dependent on the roles and functions of the local gentry under its indirect rule. This does not necessarily

mean, however, that the central government left local gentry alone to wield their political power freely. Silla's central government reserved its own supervision and surveillance system in place. For example, the central government dispatched government forces to strategically crucial points for control, dispatched monitors on a random basis, and conducted royal visits to pacify local populations. In case an uprising put a region beyond control, the central government implemented a military solution to quell any rebellion and dismantle its power base.

Ultimately, indirect rule through the preexisting power bases was nothing more than a short-term transitional method. As the system of central governance was gradually established, and the internal need for central rule increased, the posting of governors appointed by the king himself came under discussion. The need for these new governors increased as Silla's ruling base was stabilized and internal productivity rose rapidly, and was increased further still by a change in the surrounding political situation. Silla's central government accelerated its preparations for direct rule by initially posting governors such as *dosa* (道使) to limited regions.

### Growth and Recoordination of Provincial Power

Silla was accumulating precious diplomatic experience by gradually pursuing a path toward independence from Goguryeo and closely monitoring the international situation, all the while remaining under Goguryeo's aegis as its subordinate protégé. This experience stimulated Silla to read and decipher the international situation surrounding the wars that unfolded frantically between the three Korean kingdoms during the sixth and seventh centuries. In the course of seeking its independence, Silla faced a huge crisis under tremendous pressure from Goguryeo. On the one hand it was a crisis, but on the other it was also a springboard from which Silla could repair its internal system and forge ahead.

Because Silla resolved to walk the path of independence by confronting Goguryeo head on does not necessarily mean that Silla would have entrusted its support for such an ambition only through an alliance with Baekje. At that time Silla was convinced that it had strengthened its power base almost enough to confront Goguryeo. This self-confidence stemmed from its successful internal improvement and growth. The ongoing

growth of Silla powered ahead relentlessly throughout the *maripgan* era. Accordingly, Silla attempted to emerge from under Goguryeo's aegis as its might grew in the background.

Silla's rapid growth was based on its control of the provinces. As Silla controlled its provinces in a manner suited to its own circumstances, it grew domestically in leaps and bounds. Such rapid growth is clearly illustrated by the improvements in the quality and quantity of royal tombs and their burial goods: The high mound tombs erected in the fifth century are far more numerous and comparatively far larger in scale and endowed with grave goods of greater quantity and quality. This kind of significant improvement was not limited to the central ruling class, but also included the local gentry. In other words, successful governance of the provinces translated not only into growth of the central government but into the growth of the local power brokers as well.

Behind such unprecedented rapid growth lay the rise of agricultural productivity. The improvement in productivity was driven by newly developed steel farming tools of diverse usages and forms, including weeding plows, hoes, scythes, u-shaped blades, sprayers, and pitchforks. Some twenty pitchforks and fourteen u-shaped steel blades were excavated in the huge, high mound tomb Hwangnam Daechong. Other contemporary high mound tombs in the kingdom's capital and provinces have been found to contain farming tools as burial goods, although fewer in number. This reflects the fact that the provincial gentry managed and controlled agricultural productivity on a regional basis. At the apex of this system sat the *maripgan*.

Meanwhile, the nationwide construction of irrigation structures and the promotion of ox-driven farming that led to the improvement of agricultural productivity are worth noting. The fact that a reservoir with banks as long as 2,170 *bo* (步, 1 *bo* is equal to approximately 1.4 m) was built in the year 429 (13th year of King Nulji's reign) indicates that plenty of irrigation structures were being built under the central government's leadership. According to *Samguk sagi*, farming with oxen was believed to have started in 502 (3rd year of King Jijeung's reign). But as a ploughshare from a far earlier era has been found, farming with oxen must have started much earlier. This type of farming, therefore, was not initiated but far more widely promoted at the national level during King Jijeung's reign. In the year 438 (22nd year of King Nulji's reign), the government taught farmers how to maneuver oxcarts. This suggests that the government educated farmers about overall management and techniques for applying oxen to farming at the national level. Therefore,

it is reasonable to conclude that a farming method that employed the brute strength of oxen was adopted from a relatively early period.

The aforementioned facts suffice to prove that agricultural productivity during the *maripgan* period rose dramatically. This progress consequentially entailed the reconfiguration of Silla's capital. As mentioned earlier, it was the increase in agricultural productivity that made it possible to reconfigure the capital and make sure it was able to fend off Goguryeo's eventual invasion. In the meantime, human and material resources were concentrated in the kingdom's capital. Finally, the Silla capital became too congested to contain the entire inflow of resources within its preexisting structure. The so-called *bangnije* (坊里制)—a grid-based city construction method—was adopted at this time to reconfigure the kingdom's capital.

The adoption of *bangnije* then led to the reorganization of the preexisting six *bu* or regional polities. A *sisa* (市肆), or city market, was opened in the capital city for the first time in 490 (12th year of the reign of King Soji) in order to streamline the distribution of products from all over the country, which indicates that provincial manpower and products were concentrated in the kingdom's capital. The first opening of a *sisa* suggests that the amount of everyday necessities had surpassed a critical point, resulting in the accumulation of a surplus. The capital city abounded with products collected from the provinces, although the time was yet to arrive when the government could organize, manage, and control such abundance. This is the reason why it took another twenty years until the East Market (*Dongsi*) was opened in the year 509 (10th year King Jijeung's reign).

On the other hand, the fact that provincially produced products were concentrated in the kingdom's capital would suggest that a system of managing the huge influx of products had been put in place. The government installed *uyeok* (郵驛), a courier and transportation station, for the first time in AD 487 (9th year of King Soji's reign) and ordered the local administrative office to repair the *gwando* (官道), an official state road directly under the government's control. The *uyeok* was an auxiliary facility that supported the smooth delivery of documents and orders issued by the central government to the provinces. *Uyeok* were installed at various transport hubs, which suggests that the transport network was re-aligned to streamline the distribution of human and material resources in and out of the kingdom's capital and provinces. Local administrative offices were ordered to repair and maintain the *gwando* to enable the efficient operation of the *uyeok*. The need for systematic control of provinces arose in line with

the massive increase in the quantity of products flooding into the capital.

The increase in productivity prompted an influx of products into the capital, which in turn led to a widening gap between the haves and have-nots within the central ruling class. Economic disparities typically exist in a causal relationship with political power. Consequently, tension and disputes within the ruling class ensued. The aforementioned disparity of rank between Tak-bu and Satak-bu and the other regional polities intensified. With *bangnije*, the reconfiguration of the Silla capital was carried out centered on Tak-bu and Satak-bu.

The reorganization of the kingdom's capital was not the only change independently under way: the recoordination of the provinces was initiated almost at the same time, engendered most probably by a fortress construction project. Although there are no concrete records of the scale and mobilization of labor for the construction of fortresses across the provinces, given the example of a fortress built by the Ni River in AD 468 (11th year of King Jabi's reign), it seems likely that people aged fifteen and over were universally mobilized. As the need for mobilization increased, demography was studied at the national level to assess the size of the population by age and gender. Naturally, demography management offices were also installed locally. Although the provincial chief, *chongan*, must have functioned as a general manager, a sub-organization for practical jobs must have been established as well. This was the underlying reason for the foundation of an infrastructure for governance of the provinces on a national scale.

Thus, as Silla's relationship with Goguryeo continued to deteriorate in the late fifth century, the massive mobilization of a huge labor force was required for the construction of fortresses at the national level, and this ambitious effort necessitated a thorough organization of the population of each province. As a result, the previously *ad hoc* organizations of provincial populations that were operated according to each province's particular circumstances became homogenized into a more or less single form across the country. Organizations designed to manage the provincial population were set up with similar systems, as the state began intervening in order to apply systematic management to all of its provinces. In this sense, the fortress construction projects of the period must have provided crucial grounds for reorganizing the provinces.

The organization of the force for the construction work initially must have been deployed in areas urgently in need of fortresses before gradually being extended to other areas. Although homogenous organizations were not set up all at once from the beginning, the groundwork for such

a development was established. This organization of local manpower functioned as a base for fixing the taxation system and laid the groundwork for organizing government forces composed of the local population, although there was already a quasi self-defense organization under the *chongan*'s control designed to maintain peace and order in each province. The expansion of such a self-defense organization provided the means for organizing provincial military forces later on, together with administrative maintenance of the provinces.

The rise in agricultural productivity translated into a dramatic expansion of the provincial economies. The appearance of high mound tombs erected in each home base and the grave goods contained within them constitute evidence of this. Not all of the provinces in the *maripgan* era were treated equally by the central government. Rather, the provinces were treated discriminately on the basis of their respective political and military weight. This theory is also supported by the scale and quantity of the high mound tombs and the quantity and quality of the relics found inside them. High mound tombs are greater in number and larger in scale around transport hubs outbound to provinces from the center and in regions bordering hostile powers or their equivalents. Relics excavated from such tombs are equally numerous and massive. Accessories such as status symbols and daily commodities such as earthenware objects do not measure up in terms of quality to the best ones at Silla's political center, but they certainly match the next best ones. This reflects how well the provincial gentry were received at the capital in the *maripgan* era. The central government showed great respect to the gentry of regions far from the center or from transport hubs, lest they secede from or rebel against the central government.

On the other hand, regions close to the capital city, i.e. those within the domain of central governance, and regions that had merged earlier into Silla contain fewer high mound tombs that are also generally smaller in scale. This is because the central government weakened their semi-autonomous bases during the period of indirect rule when it utilized the local gentry to rule the provinces, instead of appointing a governor to them. By doing so, the central government intended to preemptively uproot the bases of potentially threatening forces within its vicinity.

## The Appointment of Governors and the Beginning of Direct Rule

Meanwhile, the central government could not just sit on its hands and idly observe the continuous growth and development of the provincial gentry. It had little alternative but to wield heavy-handed control over them at some point in order to prevent their irresistible growth. Thus Silla also came up with measures against the local gentry by the time it had severed its relationship with Goguryeo. It is possible that Goguryeo instigated the secession of Silla's local power groups as the dispute with Silla began to intensify, because Goguryeo needed to secure a bridgehead towards Silla and get their surrounding regions and the local populace on its side; and especially those regions which, having lain in the south-bound path of Goguryeo's army or been occupied by its army in the 400s, had tasted the fruits of an advanced culture. It is likely that Goguryeo tried to incite them against Silla. Yeongju and Bonghwa in Gyeongsangbuk-do (North Gyeongsang Province) and Heunghae near the East Sea coastal regions are cases in point. Interestingly these areas were recorded as Goguryeo's territory in the "Jiriji" (Topography) section of *Samguk sagi*. Such were the machinations beneath the surface on which Goguryeo's plan to invade and conquer Silla was anchored around 464. For Silla, this was even more of a reason to no longer tolerate the aggrandized local gentry as they had been. Silla had no choice but to micromanage its provinces under a declared state of war with Goguryeo. Nationwide fortress construction projects were an early form of intensive control of the provincial governments that materialized at that time.

Fortress construction projects centering around the provincial hubs are significant as they provided a stepping stone for a change of the underlying political base of the *maripgan* era. They helped to organize the provincial population and consequently to weaken the expanding economic power of the provincial gentry. Perhaps there were underhand maneuvers to impose the lion's share of the overall cost of construction on the local gentry. The mood at that time was such that the economic expansion of the local gentry could not be left alone any more. Accordingly, drastic steps to undercut the expansion of the local power bases were taken.

Control and governance of the provinces was dynamically realized by using the war with Goguryeo and the fortress construction projects as stepping stones to this end, while at the same time the work of organizing the local populations was also implemented. Although the real situation on



Fig 4. Silla Monument in Naengsu-ri, Pohang



Fig 5. Silla Monument in Jungseong-ri, Pohang

the ground is difficult to grasp, the massive mobilization of labor for the construction work would have been unthinkable if reasonable organizations were not already in place. The enduring implementation of such organization can be inferred from a measure taken in the year 489 (11th year of King Soji's reign), namely, the driving out of the "idle population" into the fields. Although the "idle population" here is hard to identify, it could refer to people who were idle not because they lacked any means of livelihood, but because they were affluent, certainly in reference to the local gentry. In other words, this exemplary action was aimed at forcing the gentry to engage in farming in person. Moreover, the fact that this kind of measure was undertaken not in an isolated region or two, but across the whole country means that recoordination of the provincial gentry had started across the board.

The organization of the local population in each province was realized by mobilizing the labor force for the aforementioned construction work as a stepping stone. In turn, it indicates that the necessary means for making deep inroads into the provinces by the state authority had been put in place. The external threat prompted Silla to tighten its internal solidarity. Recoordination of the local gentry was one such effort. Meanwhile, recoordination of the provincial population was applied not to one or two special regions, but to the country as a whole. It seems that the *chonjuje* (村主制, town lord system) was adopted to substitute the *chonganje* (town chief system) in the course of this overall recoordination.

It is not certain exactly when or how the *chonjuje* was embarked upon. Since the term *chonju* was identified for the first time in an inscription on the Silla Monument in Naengsu-ri, Yeongil erected in 503, it is reasonable to assume that year to be the earliest point in time when the *chonju* system was adopted. On the other hand, the Silla Monument in Jungseong-ri, Pohang, which was erected two years earlier in 501, does not contain the term *chonju* in its inscription; instead, it refers to an elite similar to the *chonju*, namely, *ganji* (干支). However, it is difficult to presume that the *chonju* system was implemented between the year 501 and 503. It is more probable that the *chonju* system, although launched much earlier, took time to become widespread, thus both the *chonju* system and its predecessor, the *chongan* system, were still being used interchangably. This also means that the *chonju* system was not launched across the country at the same time but was phased in transitionally. Therefore, the germination of the *chonju* system should not be traced back much earlier than the date the

term *chonju* first appeared, namely, 503.

The replacement of the *chongan* system with the *chonju* system signals that a comprehensive recoordination of the provinces was launched. The most probable time point and means whereby it was implemented are, respectively, the year 464 and the fortress construction projects that began in earnest that same year. In fact, the organization of military forces composed of provincial inhabitants was a pressing task that was absolutely essential to the defense of the kingdom against Goguryeo's offensive, in the run of fortress construction. The likelihood is that the central government believed itself justified in organizing the local gentry for the purpose of deploying the mobilization of the labor force. The *chonju* system was adopted to keep the newly organized local gentry under control. In short, adoption of the *chonju* system meant a significant loss of independence and an increase in dependence on the central government, as opposed to the *chongan* system. Government-friendly and cooperative *gan* among members of the gentry with that title were the first to receive the *chonju* title.

Likewise, behind the adoption of the *chonju* system lay the intention to weaken the provincial powers by organizing the local population. Such a radical measure must have been implemented to counter the alarmingly enlarged power bases of the local gentry. Precisely because a counterweight against the local powers was urgently needed, the most urgently prioritized regions were targeted for the *chonju* system first, and only after that was it gradually applied generally. The adoption of the *chonju* system carried serious implications for the governance of the provinces because it signified that governmental power had penetrated deeply into the provinces. With the *chonju* system, the central government also started to appoint provincial governors in order to rule the provinces directly.

It is certain that provincial governors were posted for the first time in the *maripgan* era, as governors with the *dosa* title are mentioned in the inscriptions on the Naengsu-ri and Jungseong-ri monuments. A *dosa* was a provincial governor posted to *seong* (fortress) and *chon* (village), which were set up as administrative units in the mid-early period. Accordingly, it has been established beyond doubt that *dosa* began to be appointed by royal order at some point in the fifth century, although it is unlikely that they were appointed nationwide at one and the same time, just as was the case with the *chonju* system. Regions of critical political and military importance were prioritized to receive a *dosa* earlier, followed by regions where there

was a less urgent need for them. Uncertainty about the starting point for the appointment of *dosa* notwithstanding, an educated guess would suggest that the *dosa* system was implemented in tandem with the *chonju* system. Incidentally, a significant event occurred in 497 (19th year of King Soji's reign): government officers were asked to recommend individuals capable of *mongmin*—namely, the duty of governing the people. The candidates also had to be government officers, a term that appears to have referred to all of the gentry in the Yukbu. This means that provincial governors were picked out of all the Yukbu somewhat indiscriminately, at least on the surface. Here, *mongmin-gwan* (or governor) probably refers to none other than a *dosa*. In other words, by recommendation of a *mongmin-gwan*, they must have intended either to appoint a governor to a province for the first time or to multiply the number of governors. Because each province might recommend one candidate, it seems more likely that they meant to increase the already-initiated appointment of local governors. Accordingly, it is possible that the first *dosa* was posted sometime before 497. One possible date is the year 487, when a *gwando* or state road was repaired. As *dosa* means a servant sent by the king to maintain the state roads, the repair of a *gwando* implies the posting of a *dosa*; if not, it must at least be related in some way to the posting of a *dosa*.

As such, many signs of change emerged in the *maripgan* era. On the one hand, as Silla tried to escape from Goguryeo's sphere of influence, the international situation in the region rapidly became strained. The prevailing mood for dramatic change of the system of governance for the sake of internal solidarity amid such acute tensions reached its height. On the other hand, the runaway growth of the local powers reached a critical point at which it became unavoidable for the government to rein them in. In the absence of intervention, the local powers would eventually have posed a grave threat to the central government. The fortress construction projects carried out as a preemptive measure against Goguryeo's impending invasion provided both the cause of and the means for such intervention. In carrying out these projects, the government began recoordinating the provinces and appointing governors to them, which in turn caused problems for the center and provinces alike. Conflicts of interest among the ruling powers arose in the process of solving the problems. The inscriptions on the Jungseong-ri and Naengsu-ri monuments in early sixth century shed light on this complex situation.

## 4

## Conflict within the Ruling Class and the Pursuit of a New Order

### Realignment of the Internal System

Goguryeo interpreted Silla's antagonism as evidence of a Baekje plot simmering in the background. Yesilbul, the emissary dispatched to Northern Wei, is recorded as having claimed, in his dialogue with Emperor Xuanwu, that Buyeo, which produced gold, was driven out of the mining area by the Wuji tribe (勿吉) and that Seomna (涉羅), which produced gems, was assimilated by Baekje. In the past, Goguryeo had exerted its influence to obtain gold and gems from Buyeo and Seomna and send them to Northern Wei, but this was no longer the case.

As to Seomna, there is some debate over whether Seomna here refers to Jeju Island or to Silla, although the latter appears more valid. Given that diplomatic language is generally too ambiguous to be taken at face value, Goguryeo went so far as to recognize at the time that Silla had actually merged with Baekje. Under these tense circumstances, Baekje perpetrated an incident that provoked Goguryeo even further.

After the enthronement of King Gaero of Baekje (r. 455-475), Baekje was able to renew its ruling system thanks to the success of innovative reforms centered around the royal family. This success was perceived as a grave threat by Goguryeo. King Gaero, encouraged by the successful reform of the system, provoked Goguryeo. He expanded his territory by launching an

attack on Goguryeo's southern border and then built up the defense walls (*daechaeak*, 大柵) in Cheongmongnyeong (青木嶺). To make matters worse, he sent an emissary to Northern Wei with a royal letter pleading with them to invade Goguryeo. Upon hearing of this, Goguryeo resolved to tackle Baekje and began preparing for an all-out war.

In 475 AD Goguryeo quickly marched out, defeated Baekje's capital, and captured King Gaero, who had previously dispatched his brother Munju to Silla for reinforcements as soon as Goguryeo had launched its attack. Gaero was dragged to Goguryeo's camp at Achasanseong (Acha Mountain Fortress) and was summarily executed. Thus, by the time Munju returned with Silla's 10,000 soldiers, Goguryeo had already taken Hanseong, captured King Gaero, and retreated momentarily behind the walls of Achasanseong where they executed their imprisoned king. Munju ascended to the throne without any further ado, evacuated the Han River basin, and relocated the capital to Ungjin near the Geum River in an attempt to rebuild Baekje. On hearing this news, Silla prepared an impermeable defense line against an imminent attack.

At that time, Silla had been industriously preparing for a foreseeable major invasion by Goguryeo, overhauling its warships in 467 (10th year of King Jabi's reign). Although the preparations for a sea battle could be understood as a preventive measure against a Wae offensive, they were actually based on a prediction of a contingent scenario in which Goguryeo's army would march along the coast of the East Sea. In actual fact, Goguryeo led an offensive against Siljik Fortress with the Mohe army on the northern border along the east coast in 468 (11th year of King Jabi's reign). To cope with this naval attack, Silla mobilized people from the Haseulla region en masse and built a fortress at the Niha pass.

Silla completed what is known as the geographical naming of the capital in the following year, 469. 'Geographical naming' does not simply refer to the naming of streets and towns, as the literal meaning of *bangni-myeong* implies. Rather, it signifies that Silla adopted a grid-based city system known as *bangnije* for the first time in any city plan as its first step, while remaining under the provincial system. In addition, it also implies that Silla would completely renovate the capital city in a bid to differentiate it from the past. In addition, such a renovation of the kingdom's capital suggests that Silla intended to reform the six *bu* or the provincial system. In other words, the implementation of *bangnije*, that is, administrative reform of the kingdom's capital, suggests a realignment of the six *bu* or the provincial system itself. The six *bu* system was not dismantled as a result of such changes, but the reinforcement of the ruling

authority around Takbu and Satakbu appears to have started at this point in Silla's history. These two most powerful regional polities welcomed *bangnije* as an administrative means of controlling the other four bu or regional polities. In later epigraphs, not only *gangun* but also *nama* were rarely found in the four bu (or departments) other than Takbu and Satakbu. Although the foundation of the six *bu* system was not yet dispersed, it is certain that the reform centered around Takbu and Satakbu must have been completed. In short, the adoption of *bangnije* for the capital was to accompany the realignment of the six *bu* or regional polity system. This action was, of course, fundamentally intended to cope with the crisis occasioned by Goguryeo's increasing attacks.

Silla did not neglect to reform its military system vis-à-vis Goguryeo's imminent onslaught either. The year 473 saw the appointment of two top military commanders, Beolji as *jujanggun* (general of the left wing) and Deokji as *ujanggun* (general of the right wing). These two commanders already had great military victories under their belts. The Wae army that had encroached into the Yangsan area was comprehensively defeated by these two generals in 463. Their appointment was partially attributable to such achievements. They extended their battlefield careers throughout the reigns of King Jabi and King Soji. Although the exact time of the adoption of the general system is unknown, the appointment of two generals points to an overall reform of the military system. Subsequently Silla adopted a dual-headed ministerial system in which two ministers were appointed to each key ministry. This system can be traced back to Silla's earlier reform of its military system. Silla's military reform to include 'left' and 'right' generals is likely to have been associated with the realignment of the six-*bu* system into a two-*bu* system. To sum up, the external threat of a Goguryeo invasion prodded Silla into reforming its overall socio-political order, including the reformation of its capital and military system.

Likewise, Silla embarked upon the reorganization of its provinces and its capital concurrently. Starting with construction work at *Samnyeon sanseong* (Three-Year Mountain Fortress), fortresses were eventually erected all around the country. The name of the fortress, *Samnyeon sanseong*, originated from the three-year-long period of labor mobilization required to build it, which reflects Silla's considerable dedication to fortress building. It also shows the extent to which Silla agonized over its preparations for Goguryeo's invasion from a different angle. It built numerous fortresses one after another, including Moro in 471, and Ilmo, Sasi, Gwangseok, Dapdal, Gurye, Jwara in 474. The exact locations of these fortresses are hard to pin

down, but an educated guess would suggest that all of them were situated near to transportation and strategic hubs.

As the threat from Goguryeo intensified, not only did Silla refurbish its six *bu* as discussed earlier, but it also repaired *Myeonghwal sanseong* (Myeonghwal Mountain Fortress) for the purpose of defending its capital city in 473. The word 'repair' hints that the fortress's foundations had already been laid, a supposition later proved through excavation. The major refurbishment of this fortress could mean that they redressed the earth walls with stone. Myeonghwal sanseong was situated to the east of Gyeongju and appears to have been massive. It sat on the road to the east coast beyond Churyeong mountain pass on the skirts of Mt. Toham near Gyeongju, and functioned as a critical strategic position from which to fend off Wae invaders approaching from that side. The fortress was renovated at the time in order to serve as a refuge from imminent Goguryeo offensives as well as from the Wae. In fact, no sooner had Silla's king heard the news about the fall of Baekje's Hanseong than he sought shelter in *Myeonghwal sanseong* in 475. After that, *Myeonghwal sanseong* functioned as a royal castle for another ten years until the king returned to the refurbished Wolseong Palace in 488.

As Silla had foreseen, after Goguryeo's successful foray into Baekje in 475, it led the Mohe soldiers under its command to Mijilbu (present-day Heunghae in Pohang, Gyeongsangbuk-do), immediately north of Gyeongju, by advancing southward down the east coast. Silla narrowly staved off the attack thanks to the help of the allied forces of Baekje and Gaya. Goguryeo then advanced all the way inland to Mosanseong, but Silla defeated the invaders resoundingly this time around, also with the assistance of Baekje's forces. Widespread clashes between Goguryeo and Silla continued thenceforth as well. Silla could ride out any immediate crisis by fending off its enemy either alone or with Baekje's aid. Although Silla had to counter especially concentrated offensives by Goguryeo in the late fifth century, from 464 onward Silla was not only able to thwart them, but also used them as opportunities to reform its ruling system.

The incident that triggered these tenacious attacks by Goguryeo was the slaughter of Goguryeo soldiers stationed in Silla. While Silla thwarted Goguryeo's serial offensives with a thorough and diligent bulwarking of its defense system, Baekje suffered the brunt of the damage and was forced to relocate its capital south after losing the Han River basin. This kind of experience improved Silla's diplomatic abilities to help it prepare for the future and prompted it to reconstruct its ruling order by pursuing internal

changes. In short, Silla transformed itself time and again by strengthening its interior in conjunction with the learning experience of preparing for and engaging in the struggle against its enemies.

### Emerging Conflict within the Ruling Class and the Enthronement of King Jijeung

As Silla's government tightened its control over the provinces together with its reformation of the ruling system, conflict amongst the ruling powers began to surface. As discussed earlier, further lineage classification within the ruling class was under way, and the conflicts of interest this caused aggravated the already heightened tensions to breaking point. King Soji, well aware of such incendiary tensions, sought to defuse them. A few apparent cases suggestive of such an approach by King Soji may be found in the records.

No sooner had King Soji ascended to the throne than he promoted all ministers' and officers' *jak* by one degree. It is not clear what the term *jak* specifically referred to, but perhaps it was a proto form of Silla's rank system for government posts, according to which a pay grade might also have been applied. It was rare for a king to award batch promotions upon ascending to the throne. If this were not so, other cases similar to King Soji's granting of batch promotions in celebration of his enthronement would be found later at the enthronements of King Jinheung and King Seongdeok. Therefore, such promotions of *jak* were in fact rare. Considering the rarity of the occasion, there must have been good reasons for doing it. Whatever compelled King Soji to bestow such favors must have had something to do with the heightened tensions and confrontation within the ruling class of that period.

In the same vein, it is also particularly noteworthy that a shrine was installed in Naeul in 487 (9th year of King Soji's reign). King Soji paid a visit to the royal shrine of Silla's progenitor and performed ancestral rites on the second and seventh anniversaries of his enthronement, namely, in the years 480 and 485, respectively. In the latter year, in particular, he increased the number of staff at the shrine by twenty households. This was to refurbish the shrine for the kingdom's founder. Nonetheless, a new shrine was suddenly built in Naeul two years later, some distance apart from the existing progenitor's shrine.

Naeul refers to the birth place of the country's progenitor. The semantic origin of Naeul can be interpreted in several ways: the sun, *najeong* (an ivy-

surrounded well) or *gukjeong* (a national well). It remains unclear who was being referred to as the progenitor at that time, but the predominant opinion leans toward Bak Hyekgeose. That said, the question about whose spirit was worshipped as the chief god at the Naeul Shrine is a matter of controversy. As well as the dominant theory that Bak Hyekgeose was the same spirit at both the Naeul Shrine and the royal shrine of the national progenitor, there is a variety of other theories about the chief god of the shrine, ranging from the various theories in favor of either Kim Alji, the Kim clan's progenitor, King Namul, or King Michu, to theories that the gods of heaven and earth were worshipped or that rituals of heaven worship were performed there. Still a single decisive theory has yet to be established. Nevertheless, most of the aforesaid schools of thought are clustered around an opinion that whoever was worshipped in the Naeul Shrine must have served one common purpose, namely, to bolster cohesion among the divided descent groups using a religious symbol in the course of establishing a centralized ruling system. However, it is unclear why a new shrine was erected to possibly worship another god at that point, when all the while the royal shrine of the kingdom's progenitor was functioning perfectly well. The latent significance of the new shrine could be that, for some unclear reason, the royal house sought to establish a focal point distinguished from the pre-existing one, with the new shrine as its medium. In other words, significant divisions within the ruling class could have been surfacing at the time, making it inevitable to seek internal consolidation through the erection of a new shrine.

Although by that time the functions of the progenitor's shrine had diminished to some extent compared to earlier days, it was still preserved intact. King Soji personally commemorated his ancestors in the Naeul Shrine in 495, as if he himself had replaced the old shrine with the new one. The functions intended for the progenitor's shrine were now assigned to the Naeul Shrine. This can be inferred from the fact that clear cases of the progenitor's shrine being used as a political tool have seldom been found from that time. This is the reason why the shrine is interpreted not only as an alternative to the progenitor's shrine, but also as a symbol with a set purpose beyond its role as a mere substitute for the old shrine. In short, the Naeul Shrine was intended to encourage the feuding, divided ruling class to reunite with a new attitude and fresh resolve.

That King Soji returned to Wolseong Palace at this point is also viewed as an unusual move. Indeed, it was a bold move based on the premise that the

external threat as the fundamental reason for evacuation no longer existed. Ironically, Silla clashed with Goguryeo militarily almost perennially, starting immediately from the following year of 489, and continuing in the years 494, 496, and 497. Of course, for Silla, these battles were a form of defensive warfare against Goguryeo's attacks on its border regions. In the year 495, Baekje enlisted Silla's aid against Goguryeo. Silla dispatched its army under the command of General Deokji to help Baekje overcome the crisis. This series of events suggests that the frequency of the clashes with Goguryeo had increased since the relocation of Silla's royal residence from *Myeonghwal sanseong* back to Wolseong Palace. It also suggests that the fundamental reason for the evacuation to *Myeonghwal sanseong* remained. The fact that the royal residence was relocated to Wolseong Palace, notwithstanding, suggests that the reasons for the relocation were not exclusively related to problems with Goguryeo. Perhaps it was an astute move meant to promote the king's authority and internal unity by internationally and domestically promulgating the king's departure from his place of refuge. The renovation of the palace in 495 was also closely linked to this move.

The few cases mentioned above indicate that King Soji's generation made significant efforts to integrate Silla's ruling class. Conversely, it also means that the chasm of division and conflict within the ruling class must have deepened considerably. The widely known tale of *Sa geum gap* (lit. "Shooting a geomungo case") illustrates this internal conflict. The tale, which only appears in *Samguk yusa*, can be summarized as follows:

In AD 488 (10th year of King Soji's reign), a crow and a mouse were heard wailing as King Soji was about to go to Cheoncheon Pavilion (Cheoncheonjeong, 天泉亭). Then, the mouse approached and said, "Please go where the crow goes." But the King's messenger went to Pichon in the south, only to be distracted by a fight between two pigs, whereupon he lost track of the crow. Then an old man emerged from a pond and handed the messenger a document on the cover of which were written the words, "Open it, and two people will die; do not open it, and one person will die." Upon the messenger's return with the document, the king's meteorologist commented, "The two people are commoners and the other person is the king." Accordingly, the king opened the cover and found the words, "Shoot the *geomungo* (a six-stringed musical instrument) case." Back at the palace, King Soji shot the *geomungo* case and found a monk and a royal lady dead inside the case.

This tale cannot be taken at face value although it contains a few grains of truth. For instance, at that time, monks were able to enter the inner chambers of the palace to practice Buddhist rituals and consequently came into close contact with the palace women, including the king's wives and daughters, who were called *gungju*. Because King Soji ended up killing the monk and a princess, he and the lady did not share the same destiny. It is therefore inferred that there were bitter debates over whether to embrace Buddhism or not, as Buddhism was infiltrating deeply even into the palace. The fact that King Soji killed the monk and the *gungju* makes it safe to assume that the pro-Buddhist party was tentatively retreating at this time.

The "Sa geum gap" story implies that it was the queen who sought to embrace Buddhism. The fact that a royal lady had intercourse with a monk expresses the idea that she was linked to Buddhism. Indeed, her association with Buddhism cannot have remained at the individual level; rather, she was part of a bigger group intent on importing Buddhism. The identity of the *gungju* remains unclear, but a hypothesis that she was King Soji's wife lends further interest to the account. She was Lady Seonhye, the daughter of the *ibeolchan* named Naesuk. This requires close consideration. As mentioned earlier, Seonhye was Geochilbu's paternal aunt, while Geochilbu's father, Mullyeok, is referred to as a figure holding the position of *ilgilchan* on the Silla Monument in Bongpyeong, Uljin. Given his rank, Mullyeok must have been involved in politics since the previous King Jijeung's reign.

As is widely known, Mullyeok's son, Geochilbu, left home to join the Buddhist priesthood in his youth and played a central role in politics and the military during King Jinheung's reign. Provided that Geochilbu was associated with King Jinheung's lineage—he himself once had been a Buddhist monk, and he acted as the most powerful member of the elite during the reigns of King Beopheung and King Jinheung, both of whom were pious Buddhists—it is highly likely that his family actively sought to embrace Buddhism. As the lineage classification progressed within the Kim clan, a division emerged between two opposing factions: one in favor of maintaining the traditional ideology intact, the other in favor of adopting the more advanced religion of Buddhism in pursuit of a new era. Tensions between the two factions became aggravated to the point that an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate King Soji was made.

This confrontational tendency was also exposed in the politics of the provinces. Each of the original Yukbu secured its own political and economic

bases on a province by province basis and wielded influence over them. The central government was already tightening its control by gaining a detailed grasp of each province's situation and by the reorganization of the provincial populations under a nationwide project aimed at building fortresses for the nation's defense. However, as the central authorities joined the foray in the provinces, sharp conflicts of interest arose not only among the Yukbu, including Takbu and Satakbu, but also among the intertwined lineages within each regional polity. Tensions among them began surfacing as reorganization of the provinces was prompted by the program of fortress construction. An incident engendered by King Soji's royal visit to Nari-gun (present-day Yeongju, Gyeongsangbuk-do) in the last year of his reign clearly illustrates the situation.

King Soji paid a royal visit to Nari and stayed in the house of a member of the local gentry, Paro, in 500 (22nd year of King Soji's reign). King Soji received lavish treatment and had an intimate relationship with Paro's own daughter, Byeokwha. King Soji, as the head of Takbu, revealed that his clan was exceptionally attached to a special region. Incidentally, Nogu from Gota-gun (present-day Andong, Gyeongsangbuk-do), which was on the route taken by King Soji to Nari-gun, came forward to criticize not only King Soji's traveling incognito, but also his behavior. Although the content of his criticism was too Confucian in nature to be taken literally, it shows that a preferred relationship with a special region stirred up resentment and complaints in other regions. It also signifies that the central government's policies regarding the provinces were not undiscriminating across the provinces. A revolt by Nogu reflects the standpoints of the local elite and the ruling class of Silla's royal capital. This can also be inferred from the fact that King Soji smuggled Byeokwha into the palace, installed her in special quarters, and fathered a child with her.

At any rate, the problems surrounding the official acknowledgement of Buddhism, the procedure for the reorganization of the provinces, and so forth aroused bitter disputes. The two events mentioned above alluded to such a point, and may be viewed as the growing pains that inevitably accompany the birth of a new era. The sharper and wider the range of such pains, the more violent the ensuing friction and confrontation become. Now it was merely a matter of time before the tensions among the confronting power groups would reach breaking point.

Silla began suffering internal conflicts in the late *maripgan* era as the tensions between the two opposing power groups were eventually aggravated into outright conflicts in the form of a so-called confrontation between King

Soji and King Jijeung. King Soji was a *maegeumwang* (the head of Takbu) and King Jijeung was a *galmunwang* (second only in the political hierarchy to the head of Satakbu), a position almost equal to the former in terms of power. The two men were different in terms of their lineages. So were their political standpoints. The *maegeumwang* stuck to the prevailing tradition, whereas the *galmunwang* sought a new orientation. The former rejected Buddhism, the latter embraced it. Although the former prevailed in the first showdown between them, the latter prevailed in the second round.

According to the record inscribed on the Naengsu-ri Monument, King Jijeung had been a *galmunwang* as the head of Satakbu before his ascent to the throne. He appears to have experienced little difficulty in getting himself crowned at the old age of sixty-four, after the death of King Nulji. However, his progress cannot have been quite so smooth, given that King Jijeung's age was impractically high, that he was from Satakbu, that King Soji's last days were suspicious, that the year of King Jijeung's enthronement varies from one record to another, that he played a focal role for the run of politics as a *galmunwang*, and that no sooner had he been crowned than he began to implement various reforms in a rather energetic manner.

King Jijeung as a *galmunwang* of Satakbu could not have succeeded to the throne via the normal channels. This point is rather strongly backed up by the fact that King Soji's last days were sullied by a disgraceful incident, namely, his escapade with Byeokwha from Nari-gun, which resulted in the birth of a baby. It would probably be more accurate to assume that King Jijeung ascended to the throne through a spell of political upheaval rather than through a normal succession. That being the case, he would have felt compelled to execute many reform policies to create a new order as soon as he was crowned. He laid the foundations for future revolutionary policies such as the promulgation of legal codes (*yulleyeong*, 律令), the acknowledgement and acceptance of Buddhism, and bureaucratic reorganization, all of which would be earnestly pursued during King Beopheung's reign. He was also very successful in his plans to expand Silla's territory toward the Nakdong River basin and the East Sea. In so doing, King Jijeung's reign can be assessed by any measure to have practically ushered in the beginning of the heyday of the mid-early period.

## Chapter 3

# Transformation into a Centralized Power System and Its Operation

Establishment and Operation of the Legal System  
Expansion of Territory and Establishment of a New Ruling Order  
Establishment of a Bureaucratic System  
Pursuit of a New Ruling System

## 1

## Establishment and Operation of the Legal System

### King Jijeung's Reform Policies

King Jijeung ascended to the throne despite the fact that he was already too old to become a king in the normal way. However, he vigorously executed new policies. The aim was to establish a ruling order clearly distinguished from the one that had existed previously. The following are the key facts in this regard.

First, King Jijeung prohibited the practice of interment of the living with the dead in 502, the third year of his reign. At the time of the death of his immediate predecessor, King Soji, the number of sacrifices for the interment of the living with the dead had been restricted to five males and five females and was now reduced to none. Although it is unclear when the practice of interment of the living with the dead was adopted, we know for sure that there was no restriction on the number of those sacrificed. After a transitional period in the wake of King Soji's death, when the number of sacrifices was reduced to ten, the custom itself was abolished. Underlying factors beneath the prohibition of interment of the living with the dead were an interlocking combination of the Buddhist philosophy of respecting life and a historical situation in which there was a labor shortage. The prohibition was naturally accompanied by a complete change in the way funerals were conducted. That the mourning cloth law was enacted only two years later in 504 reflects this.

Although the exact content of the mourning cloth law is not known because of a lack of records, it was a declaration of the state's intention to control and manage the overall funeral arrangements—rituals, methods, procedures, and size—for the royal family and aristocrats. This foreshadowed the fact that a new ruling order, centered on a national king, would be put in place before long. However, this was not restricted to the ruling class of the royal capital; its impact also reached the potentates of the provinces.

Second, oxen were first used in farming in 504. As the fact that the very purpose of ox-farming lay in promotion of agriculture reveals, raising the level of agricultural productivity was the core motivation for the introduction of ox farming. However, given that agricultural tools used with oxen were excavated prior to this period, this was not the first time this type of farming had been adopted. The implementation of farming with oxen expressed the state's desire to directly rule the provincial potentates by controlling such agricultural tasks as raising oxen, managing farming tools, and mobilizing farmers. In other words, the implementation of farming with oxen concealed the thinly veiled intent of the central government to increase its ruling power over its provinces, another tactical policy similar to the implementation of new funeral rituals by which the state of Silla could dominate its provinces.

Third, there was a conclusive decision regarding the country's name, Silla in 503. Heretofore, the country had been referred to not only as Silla, but also by a variety of other names such as Saro (斯盧), Sara (斯羅), and Seorabeol (徐羅伐). These names differed in meaning as well as in their written forms. In general, they are classified into "Silla descents" and "Saro descents." Saro descents are names for the country stemming from the preexisting Saroguk, referring narrowly to the present Gyeongju basin only. Saro functioned as the kingdom's capital and comprised its six departments at the same time. Silla, on the other hand, as the name of the country, referred to the whole country, composed of its center, Saro, and the territory of its merged provinces. Its exterior could expand without limit. Silla was used for external purposes, while Saro was used to differentiate the kingdom's capital from its provinces. Both of them were used interchangeably for a long time, but Silla was intended to be the only country title from then on. Nonetheless, they manicured the adoption of Silla as the state's exclusive title with the claim that the name originated from the phrase "*Deok eob il sin mang na sa bang*" (The new virtuous rule shall prevail over the country). Ever since that time, only Silla's king was allowed to use the Chinese-style king's title. The significance of the resolution of the country's title is that

the kingdom's capital and its provinces were contained in one unit, at least superficially. This means that Silla's king could surpass his diminutive image as the king of insignificant Saroguk and project a strong impression as the powerful king of a recognized country containing annexed provinces. Similarly, the authorities resolved to replace the king's previous, native title of *mariptgan* with the Chinese title of *wang*, a practice followed by subsequent kings of Silla. This is the reason that all vassals conformed to the formality of submitting the new title to Silla's king. In doing so, a way was paved to raise the status of Silla's king in a meaningful way. A foundation was laid for establishing the awareness of the whole country by promulgating the idea of a sole ruler over the entire territory. In other words, the conclusive choice of "Silla" as the country's title was a declaration of the dawning of a new era.

Fourth, Silla's king coordinated the entire national territory in the form of *ju*, *gun*, and *hyeon* (州郡縣). This was done in order to manage the whole country under one system. The official titles for the unit of the reorganized provinces were not originally like that, but were adopted later. Taking this final step for uniformly coordinating the whole country as one unit was not without specific intent; that the entire territory was reorganized in the name of Silla's king was also an expression of the intent to apply virtuous rule to all provinces impartially and evenly, a reorganization that dovetailed the finalizing of the country's name and the adoption of the Chinese-style king's title. The overall intent, therefore, was not just to expand territory, but also to ensure the existing territory was maintained. To this effect, Silla's officials founded Siljikju (悉直州) and appointed Isabu as its first governor. One great achievement that resulted from this was that not only did Silla expand swiftly northward along the East Sea coast to annex the Gangneung region, but it also annexed Usanguk (present-day Ulleung-do) in 512. By doing so, a foundation was laid whereby Silla could step by step increasingly rule its provinces directly through the appointment of governors for provinces.

### Promulgation of the Law by King Beopheung

It was King Beopheung (r. 514-540) who revamped the legal system in earnest on the basis of the reform policies initiated by King Jijeung. King Beopheung, King Jijeung's eldest son, endeavored to systematically secure his father's basic policies. Although he also has another title 'Mojeukjiwang' in Silla's traditional

style, he is far better known as King Beopheung, a name meaning ‘establishing the law,’ because he was committed to establishing the legal system. For example, ‘King Beopheung’ is not a posthumous title, but was the one in use during his lifetime. Although the title emanated from his achievement in publicly acknowledging Buddhism, it harbors another meaning, namely, that he established the legal system, because King Beopheung established not only Buddhist rules, but also the civil legal system.

King Beopheung promulgated the legal mandate in the seventh year of his reign. It goes without saying that Silla’s legal mandate was based on Chinese legal mandates, which came to Silla via Goguryeo and Baekje. The term ‘legal mandate’ refers to a dual system composed of *yul* in reference to criminal law and *yeong* in reference to administrative law. The legal mandate developed in the form of a statute system that had been devised so that the country could be ruled as in China. This system had been exported to the regions surrounding China along with other major aspects of Chinese culture, including the use of Chinese characters and Confucianism, all of which took root as the basic system for running a country. That Silla had to promulgate a legal mandate signifies in itself that its society was sufficiently refined as to require such elements for the administration of the country. Silla’s state system had been gradually refurbished since King Jijeung’s reign, and it had finally matured sufficiently to reach this critical juncture where an efficient system was required to manage the fruits of its refinement.

There is actually a great deal of controversy about the exact content of the legal mandate declared at that time. The controversy boils down to two disparate schools of thought about what Silla’s then statute covered: one maintains that Silla’s statute contained the complete fundamental laws concerning the running of the state, whereas the other posits that it contained no more than the basic provisions to regulate Silla’s vassals’ compensatory land system and its use of different colored robes for rank classification based on the assessment that Silla’s development had not come of age yet. However, because of the lack of certifiable and concrete records, the first school of thought has been dismissed as mere speculation.

Subsequently, the Jeokseong Monument of Silla in Danyang was discovered, and the situation took a dramatic turn. Here, a catalogue for the land system, called *Jeonsabeop* (佃舍法), age grades, and other items were uncovered. This discovery attested to the fact that the legal mandate in those days transcended the simple level of the compensatory land system,



Fig 1. Jeokseongbi Monument of Silla in Danyang

*Gongbokje* (公服制), and covered various other areas. To add to this, the Silla Monument in Bongpyeong, Uljin, discovered in 1988, with its even more specific content, verified the sophistication of Silla’s legal mandate. This monument, constructed in 524, gives descriptions like *Daegyobeop* (大教法) in direct reference to the actual declaration of the legal mandate during King Beopheung’s reign and a catalogue for specific legal mandates described as *noinbeop* (奴人法). Because *noin* refers collectively to the population of the countries annexed by Silla, *Noin* Law was a sort of catalogue for statutes that regulated the social class status and character of the conquered population. Indications of physical punishment, like flogging 60-100 times, are also recorded in the same inscription. Flogging, together with spanking, forced labor, exile, and execution, was one of the five punishments under Chinese criminal law, thus attesting to the importation of the Chinese-style legal mandate. Silla’s legal mandate under King Beopheung’s reign was a combination of Chinese-style criminal law and Silla-style administrative law.

As such, as attested to by the specific catalogue found on the newly discovered stele materials, Silla’s legal mandate clearly comprised far more than simple provisions for Silla’s vassals’ compensatory land system but dealt with the overall management of the entire state. Furthermore, it is assumed that catalogues for the *golpum* (bone-rank) system, official rank system, public office

system, and so forth, which are thought to have been established by this time, were included, albeit probably in fragmentary forms. Although it was not Silla's traditional punishment system, the five-punishment system reflects the fact that Silla's society went through enormous changes, from the bottom up. This implies a powerful ruling authority during King Beopheung's reign, as declaring such a legal mandate without it would have been difficult, if not impossible.

The purpose of the legal mandate was not to suppress the population indiscriminately, but to realize the underlying virtue of Confucianism, benevolence (*in* 仁). As communal society disintegrated and a new centralized aristocratic ruling system emerged, it was possible that the ruling class would try to maintain the preexisting order or commit abuses in an arbitrary or indiscriminate way. Leaders and aristocrats were meant to be completely blocked from engaging in arbitrary exploitation through the implementation of the king's moral rule according to the philosophy that the land and people on it belong to the king. The stable cultivation of a new ruling order was pursued by homogenizing the population as citizens through the impartial enforcement of the law, at least superficially. The purpose for doing this was to achieve the ultimate establishment of a centralized ruling system oriented around the king. The shrewdest method to maintain the ruling order was to run a diligent bureaucratic system on the basis of rational principles. King Beopheung systematically tried to include the ruling order in the legal mandate under these circumstances. In short, it was the promulgation of the legal mandate that ushered in the visible transformation of Silla's society.

### Decree of Buddhism and Appointment of the Sangdaedeung, the Head of the King's Council

Significant socio-political changes require a new ruling ideology. Myths or legends about heaven-sent rulers sufficed to justify authority in the early stages of country formation. That each and every unit of the communal society preserved a universal propensity for fables means that consecration of the ruler as a heaven-sent deity must have worked quite well as a way of maintaining order. However, with the growing sophistication of society and development of knowledge, the situation changed considerably. The emergence of large-scale political systems from the amalgamation of several

groups meant such mythical ideologies were no longer sufficient and a new ideology that dovetailed with the new policy of centralized power was called for. A newly adopted religion that fitted this situation perfectly was Buddhism.

Buddhism had been accepted and officially acknowledged in Goguryeo or Baekje as early as the late fourth century. Although lagging behind its rivals, Silla was keenly aware of Buddhism through its time-honored contacts with China as indeed were Goguryeo and Baekje, which had both already accepted Buddhism before Silla, but Silla had not yet matured sufficiently to be able to understand and embrace Buddhism. It was not until the turn of the sixth century that the socio-political mood in Silla advanced enough to necessitate a new ruling ideology.

From the early fifth century, Buddhism had already spread sporadically and unofficially in some provinces, preceding the official promulgation of Buddhism by royal decree. The first regions known to have been influenced by Buddhism were marginal regions, relatively far-flung from the kingdom's capital, like Ilseon (present-day Seonsan, Gyeongsangbuk-do). Here, a monk from Goguryeo named Ado propagated Buddhism during King Nulji's reign. This region must have been a transport hub for all travelers on their way from Goguryeo's border toward Silla's capital, or maybe Goguryeo forces were stationed there during Goguryeo's southward foray in the year 400. From that time, Buddhism had gradually spread into regions around Seonsan, eventually drawing many followers from the capital as well.

However, as a failed attempt to assassinate King Soji in a plot demonstrated in 488, the royal family itself was composed of warring factions. Pro-Buddhist and anti-Buddhist factions engaged in intense confrontations and disputes. Therefore, in the wake of the failed assassination, it took many more twists and turns before Buddhism was officially acknowledged. King Jijeung's enthronement was also an external byproduct of such disputes. Even King Jijeung, a Buddhist himself, had to take his time before eventually promulgating Buddhism by decree because the anti-Buddhist faction could not just be ignored. The king took a circumventing approach by laying the foundation for Buddhism, for example, through the prohibition of the interment of the living with the dead, instead of pursuing a confrontational path through the direct promulgation of Buddhism by royal decree. Now, as King Beopheung stepped up his efforts to revamp the system, the mood for the promulgation of Buddhism by decree was much more receptive.

Royal authority was consolidating just as King Beopheung's decree

on Buddhism was being promulgated. In his attempt to strengthen the state's military foundations, King Beopheung created a defense department among the ranks of departments for the first time. The administration of military forces, heretofore scattered among six different departments, was now united under one roof. In short, King Beopheung created a central government military force under his expanded command. By doing so, he laid a foundation, not only for the official promulgation of Buddhism, but also for its successful acculturation. Although having vied with Baekje as its medium, Silla dispatched an emissary to the Liang dynasty during the Chinese Southern and Northern Dynasties Period to announce its presence immediately after the official promulgation of Buddhism in 521. Emperor Wu, who had piously joined the Buddhist priesthood, was on the throne in monk's robes at that time. The emperor's commitment to Buddhism had a major influence on the policies on Buddhism of Baekje's King Seong. Emperor Wu's firm commitment formed the backdrop for King Beopheung's decree promulgating Buddhism. However, a backlash against Buddhism from traditionalist aristocrats in Silla was inevitable, and a series of confrontations leading up to the official promulgation of Buddhism was inescapable.

King Beopheung had his supporter, Yi Chadon, build the Heungnyun Temple (興輪寺, whose meaning is the "flourishing of Buddhism"), in Cheongyeongnim (天鏡林) in Sodo, one of the strongholds of Silla's traditional religion. Fierce resistance from the aristocrats ensued. Although he was Yi Chadon's accomplice in this venture, King Beopheung had to take extreme action to circumvent this ferocious opposition and had Yi Chadon beheaded. At the very moment Yi Chadon was decapitated, a miraculous event was said to have taken place. White blood gushed out from his neck, and his head landed in Baengnyul Temple in Mt. SoGeumgang to the north of Silla's capital. This event convinced King Beopheung of the correctness of Buddhism, and eventually led to the defeat of the anti-Buddhist faction and the official promulgation of Buddhism.

As opposed to Goguryeo and Baekje, who imported Buddhism directly from the Chinese dynasties to which they were respectively diplomatically related, Silla took its own course. Silla's course in importing Buddhism was not a top-down but a bottom-up approach. It was embraced by the commoners in the beginning, and gradually spread upwards, eventually reaching the royal family and chief aristocrats. Even then, there were many ups and downs before the eventual official approval of Buddhism. This aspect of the transmission of

Buddhism to Silla set Silla's adoption of Buddhism apart from that of its peers. This is also why Silla, because of its quick spread and proactive application, could apply Buddhism to the management of the country in a relatively short time despite its belated public acknowledgement of Buddhism.

Incidentally, a controversial question has been raised about the date of the decree. Buddhism is thought only to have been publicly acknowledged in 535, based on the fact that construction work for Heungnyun Temple had not been resumed until 535. Based on the fact that the Sangdaedeung was installed as chair for the aristocrats' assembly (*Daedeung*), it is thought that King Beopheung achieved the official promulgation of Buddhism by compromising with the aristocrats in yielding his position as chairman of the assembly to the latter. This would have been a steep price to pay because in doing so, the king's national authority would have been considerably diminished compared with a Sangdaedeung-led Daedeung.

However, we cannot overlook King Beopheung's declaration of the killing-prohibition decree vis-à-vis the official acknowledgement of Buddhism in 528 because this prohibition of killing makes sense only against the backdrop of the public acknowledgement of Buddhism. As such, it is not an overstatement to pinpoint this as the year for the official acknowledgement of Buddhism. The reason that the resumption of construction of Heungnyun Temple was ordered belatedly was that it took some time to resolve confrontations and disputes. Resumption was not possible until such confrontations and disputes had been completely resolved. In this sense, the appointment of the Sangdaedeung must also be interpreted differently.

The Sangdaedeung presided over the Daedeung Conference composed of Daedeung (aristocrats). In the same way that "Sangdaedeung" is referred to as "Sangsin" or top vassal, the word "Daedeung" consists of *dae* meaning "big" and a plural suffix, *deung*, which has the same meaning as *sin* (臣, vassal). The opposite of *sin* is *gun* or king. Accordingly, the Daedeung Conference was a vassals' conference under the king's authority and the Sangdaedeung was its chair. This means that the king and his vassals were clearly distinguished from each other in the Daedeung Conference. The Sangdaedeung acted not only as the king's counselor, but also as a linchpin who brokered dealings between the Daedeung and the king. Admission to the Daedeung Conference was not automatically granted to civil servants above a certain rank or aristocratic civil servants with privileged status. Crucial matters at state level were determined in the conference and

enforced through the king's approval. This was the reason that the same conference body would later be referred to as the Hwabaek Conference. *Hwabaek* means to submit reports with a harmonized resolution. Harmonization indicates that divisive issues were thrashed out so as to reach an agreeable resolution. Interestingly, such resolutions were elicited unanimously and were submitted exclusively to the king.

In this sense, the Daedeung Conference was a body wherein the king and his vassals were undoubtedly distinct from each other. The fact that the Sangdaedeung or king's counselor presided over the conference in lieu of the king means that the king's status was greatly altered, thus making it very unlikely to be an outcome that the king and his vassals had hammered out on an equal standing. Because King Beopheung had triumphed in his battle over the public approval of Buddhism, he delegated his role to the Sangdaedeung to wield the scepter over the state.

However, a conference body under a departmental system, which also determined crucial matters of state for Silla, gave birth to the Daedeung Conference. Only leaders referred to as *gan* among the six departments' potentates could attend the conference, their conference was called the Jegan Conference. The number of attendees admitted to the conference differed, depending on each of the six departments' size and power. This discriminatory admission policy reflected the disparity of power among the six departments. It was the king, the *maripgan*, who presided over this conference. The then-king of Silla was the highest ruler as president of the Tak department, but not an absolute ruler, because his power was mitigated by the conference's resolutions.

Meanwhile, a new conference body composed of ministers from the Jegan Conference was formed. As a result of the organization of the Daedeung Conference, its leadership was turned over to the Sangdaedeung. From this point, the king's status changed considerably. Having been referred to as *maegeumwang* (similar to *maripgan*) immediately prior to this point in time, he began to be addressed as *daewang* (大王) in 530. That the king was addressed as *daewang* means that his status had climbed past merely that of the highest ruler to be an absolute ruler. In fact, the delegation of the chair to the Sangdaedeung was not an outcome of a bargain with vassals; it was instead intended to distinguish the king's status from that of the aristocrats. As a result, Silla's *daewang* greatly surpassed his former status as a mere leader of aristocrats.

As such, official approval of Buddhism in Silla was not so much the mere outcome of negotiation as a token of the king's triumph in the fierce battles precipitated by Yi Chadon's martyrdom. As a result, most of the potentates capable of challenging the king were overpowered. Because successful official approval of Buddhism led naturally to increasing the king's authority, the Sangdaedeung was selected and appointed as a monarchy-friendly king's counselor, not to supersede the king but to voice the king's opinion at his behest. Although the Sangdaedeung's role changed constantly in accordance with the fluctuating changes of the king's authority, the Sangdaedeung always acted in accordance with the monarch's wishes. The unprecedented adoption of an era name, Geonwon, in the twenty-third year of King Beopheung's reign in 536 shows the undeniably enormously strengthened status of Silla's king.

However, the change in the king's status was not the only thing that underwent great change. The existing six-department system also underwent a ground-up transformation. The autonomous functions of the departments changed completely and, as a result, the six-department system dating back to the *maripgan* era was uprooted. Even the king merely played a role as head of the Tak department under the department system. Even the heading for the description of the king in writing was his department's name. It was not until he began being addressed as *daewang* that the department name was dropped. This proves that the king's status had surpassed that of a mere department head.

Incidentally, the dismantling of the department system did not take place all of a sudden in King Beopheung's reign. The groundwork had been gradually laid in the course of ongoing system reform since King Jijeung had seized the throne. As the remainder of the department system was jointly headed by the Tak and Satak departments, the preexisting department system could not but deteriorate. The king's victory in the showdown over the official acknowledgement of Buddhism dealt the already dying system a fatal blow. The department system lost all of its purpose except its function to draw boundaries between the districts of the kingdom's capital. As the department system was phased out, a centralized aristocratic state was phased in.

King Beopheung, the architect behind the foundation of the central ruling system, passed away in 540 (27th year of Beopheung's reign). His tomb was erected on the mountaintop to the north of Aegong Temple. Because Aegong Temple had not yet been built at that time but was built later, the tomb's location is certainly somewhere below Mt. Seondo, but it is hard to pin down. In fact, it is only with King Beopheung's tomb

that specific locations for royal tombs begin showing up in the records. Up to this point, Silla's royal tombs had all been erected together across Daereungwon in the central part of the Gyeongju basin. This area features concentrations of not only royal tombs, but also tombs of other ruling classes. The fact that the ruling classes' tombs are concentrated in one area reflects that they had a strong sense of communalism. By contrast, the fact that King Beopheung's tomb was not erected near this area but outside it reflects the beginning of a denial of that sense of communalism. It was another sign of the times, in the same vein as the king's ascendancy to transcendent status, the assumption of the title of *daewang*, and the collapse of the communal department system.

### Revamping of the *Golpum* (Bone-rank) System and the New Ruling System

King Jijeung's various innovative reform policies were followed by King Beopheung's even more vigorous actions, prompting visible changes in Silla's overall ruling order compared to the earlier era. The underlying system was being restructured to suit the king's new, transcendently altered status because long-term preservation of the new ruling system could not be assured without such systematic support. The decree and official approval of Buddhism were executed in the same kind of context. One aspect of the changes that is of particular note is the coordination of the status system called the *golpum* (lit. bone-rank) system.

As the country moved towards a system where power was centralized in the aristocracy, the underlying character of the ruling class as the pillar of the country's status quo also altered. Where the original ruling class had featured communal leaders, the new class was composed of aristocratic bureaucrats. Although meager in bureaucratic features, the new ruling class paved the way to the shaping of the future ruling class. As such, a proper, coherent system for reproducing such aristocratic bureaucrats needed to be put in place. The *golpum* system (a lineage rank system) was the answer.

The origins of the *golpum* system could, in theory, be traced back to the beginning of time. However, it emerged in the form of a system for the first time in the seventh year of King Beopheung's reign, when a legal mandate was proclaimed. Up until then, bureaucrats had been divided between a monk (called

*gan*) and his subordinate monk who actually dealt with the everyday work. The only definite thing was that their positions were hereditary, although their socio-political status was not systematically guaranteed.

However, if such a fact was recorded in a catalogue in King Beopheung's legal mandate, the situation changes. A mere customarily approved prerogative was now guaranteed systematically by the statute. The *golpum* system started functioning as a strict restraining factor on the ruling class as the status system began to function. Of course, the *golpum* system was not perfect from the outset; it matured with and was affected by the improving political system. In other words, the *golpum* system was not launched as an immutable, intransigent system, but evolved gradually and commensurately with the ruling system.

The etymology of *golpum*, has been understood as a combination of *gol* (bone) and *pum* (rank) from *dupum* (head rank). However, this theory has been viewed with scepticism because the root of the word *dupum* is *du*, not *pum*. *Pum* is merely a suffix that indicates grade. As such, *golpum* is not a combination of *gol* and *dupum*, but a merger of two separate entities, *golpum* and *dupum*. This means that *du* refers only to a head and therefore reflects increasing respect and valuation commensurate with the rise in number. Which head *du* here refers to is unknown, because *du* indicated numbers of humans or animals generally; but it must have indicated the number of humans or animals under a person's sway or the ability to control so many humans and animals. Hence, the greater the number of *dupum*, the higher the status.

Given that *golpum* was distinguished from *dupum*, it must have had another meaning. Although there is a controversy about whether *gol* referred to bone or blood, it is proper to understand *gol* in association with *du*. Therefore, *gol* refers to the brain within the head. In this sense, *gol*, as the core substance of the head, must have been considered more significant than *du*, representing the skull. Therefore, as the term *dupum* originated from the concept that the head, *du*, was a grading unit, so did the term *golpum* because the brain, *gol*, was also a grading unit.

As described above, the two terms, *golpum* and *dupum*, had coexisted for a while, until at some point *golpum* began representing both terms, thus creating the term *golpum* system. Then, *golpum* meant grade of brain narrowly and status system encompassing *dupum* broadly. The latter is today's reference for *golpum*.

The *golpum* system consisted of a total of eight grades of *golpum* (broken down into two tiers, *seonggol* [sacred bone] and *jingol* [true bone]) and six grades in *dupum*. However, it is hard to believe that the eight-grade structure was in effect from the beginning as soon as King Beopheung promulgated the legal mandate in the seventh year of his reign. For example, the highest grade, sacred bone, did not appear until King Jinpyeong's reign. Accordingly, when King Beopheung systematized the *golpum* system for the first time, the likelihood is that *golpum* consisted of one grade and *dupum* was yet to be refined into several grades, let alone as many as six. Sacred bone probably branched out from *gol* and true bone embodied the remainder of the original *gol*; simultaneously, *dupum* was refined into as many as six grades to eventually form a total of eight grades. The term, *palpum seonggol* (eight grade-sacred bone) reflects such a fact, although only vaguely.

The core factor in the operation of the *golpum* system lies in distinguishing between *golpum* and *dupum*. *Golpum* and *dupum* were divided by a gap impossible to close. *Golpum* refers to a privileged status reserved exclusively for the top ruling class. Its constituents tried to use this to monopolize all prerogatives in controlling politics, so the last thing they wanted was to share their rights with an ever-growing pool of constituents. As such, *golpum* could not be further subdivided, unless exceptional cases arose. For example, the emergence of *seonggol* classes was attributed to the special socio-political situation at that time. The subdivision of *dupum*, however, was achieved with comparatively less difficulty and was necessary because the framework of the preexisting system needed to be maintained in the course of political operations led chiefly by the *golpum* class. Accordingly, just as sacred bone, which later branched out from *golpum*, was vulnerable to early extinction, so were the lower ranks of *dupum*.

The existing ruling class prior to the systemization of the *golpum* system was categorized into two groups: *gan* and *bigan*. The likelihood is that while *gan* were responsible for the political management of Silla's society overall, *bigan* were responsible for the actual administrative work under the former's command. Because each responsibility required expertise in its given area, it became hereditary. As the central ruling system evolved, roles for *gan* and *bigan* were subdivided into their own areas of responsibility and graded based on their relative superiority and inferiority. In doing so, demarcation lines formed within *bigan* and within *gan*, as well as between *gan* and *bigan*, resulting in the formation of different strata.

However, the highest *gan* grades implemented the demarcation lines between different grades as insurmountable barriers by strictly applying the boundaries to the lower grades. By doing so, they tried to perpetuate their prerogatives. That a clear boundary was drawn between the same type of high grades in both *golpum* and *dupum* is a case in point. What the highest grades most jealously tried to guard were the demarcation lines drawn within *gan*. Even the boundary between lower *gan* and higher *bigan* were attentively guarded in order to protect the highest rulers' privileges. Accordingly, the *golpum* system started with the categorization between *golpum* and *dupum*, which has two subcategories of *gan* and *bigan*. The boundaries between these three grades were firmly fixed as insurmountable barriers. This was how the Silla's ruling system, based on the *golpum* system, which was far more than just a status system, was stably sustained. As such, in terms of structure the *golpum* system was a status system based on the three grades as its axis.

The most prominent feature of the *golpum* system was that it was a status system reserved for constituents of the kingdom's capital. Because the provincial population were seen as outsiders beyond the realm of *golpum*, another status system was set up only for them. As such, it is not an overstatement to say that the *golpum* system was a status system reserved for the winners orbiting around the ruling class of Silla's source kingdom, Saroguk. In other words, it was by means of the *golpum* system that the ruling class of the kingdom's capital was managed.

### Structure and Management of the Official Rank System

If the *golpum* system was a collective status system which predetermined social status upon birth according to the parents' lineage, the official rank system straddled both the *golpum* system and civil organization. Bureaucracy was also referred to as *guanwi*, *gwanpum*, and *gwangye*. Official rank was a mark of one's status that showed the position occupied by an individual in the official rank system. The management of the official rank system was regulated by the *golpum* system. Accordingly, the official rank system cannot be correctly understood only from the point of view of the civil official system, but also from that of the *golpum* system. Inversely, the official rank system sheds light on specific aspects of the *golpum* system.

In fact, the *golpum*, official rank, and civil official systems were closely

linked to one another because they had been managed as one system before they were divided. As Silla's political society and its ruling system had evolved in parallel since the fourth century, the three previously mentioned systems drifted away from one another. It is only because none of them could outgrow their basic system that their management was interlocked in the end. *Gan* were a case in point because they were allocated to every potentate randomly, both in the kingdom's capital and in the provinces. For instance, whoever received the title of *gan* could bequeath its status in terms of the status system, occupy a position in terms of the civil official system, and be ranked within the organization in terms of the official rank system. These three traits, which had remained undivided and intertwined, began to be broken down into smaller units. That some official positions like *daesa* and *saji* could function until later times is sufficient to circumstantially prove such a fact.

Each of the three kingdoms took gradual steps to complete its civil official system, while revamping its ruling system. As a result, all three of them created their own official rank system, and diplomacy and trade among the three kingdoms enabled them to trade influence in each other's official rank systems. By doing so, all three of them shared similarities in terms of operation, although they also had their differences, due to disparities in sociopolitical foundation, the backdrop to the systems' formation, and the course of their formation.

One particular difference was that Silla ran its official rank system in a dual format: *gyeongwi* and *oewi*. *Gyeongwi* was the official rank system reserved only for those in the kingdom's capital, while *oewi* was for the population in the provinces. Although we cannot know for sure, we have so far found no record of Goguryeo or Baekje using such a dual format, and it is probably safe to assume that the dual format for the official rank system was a feature reserved to Silla.

The reason that only Silla ran its official rank system in dual format by differentiating those in the capital from the provinces was that attitudes towards the provincial population and their treatment were unique in Silla. The three kingdoms were fundamentally different in how they regarded their provincial population, which engendered completely different approaches in their treatment by the ruling classes. Goguryeo and Baekje, at least on the surface, seemed to accept their provincial population without discrimination, while Silla did otherwise.

Although Silla ran its official rank system in dual format, *gyeongwi* for its

capital's constituents was, of course, the core of the system. That Silla ran a separate official rank system called *oewi* for the provincial population only means that the latter was coordinated in a different status structure than that of the capital. This was to discriminate against the population of the provinces by excluding them from the mainstream status system, the *golpum* system. Silla wanted to remind its provincial inhabitants that they were a conquered people by categorizing them in a status system different from that for those of Saroguk descent. That a term, *noin*, had sometimes been used in reference to the provincial population up until the sixth century circumstantially attests to this. Later, however, *oewi* gradually disappeared into history as the three kingdoms' central power systems advanced and struggles among them intensified. It vanished completely and left only *gyeongwi* as a single official system in the early post-unification period or late seventh century. However, Silla never lost its *oewi*-exemplified discriminatory mentality against its provincial population, which was one of the reasons that Silla's society was casually referred to as being a closed society.

The practical official rank system, *gyeongwi*, consisted of seventeen grades and had nearly been perfected by the time King Beopheung proclaimed the legal mandate in the seventh year of his reign. Although a record in the *Samguk sagi* reads as if the entire seventeen-grade system had already been put in place all at once in the ninth year of King Yuri's reign (AD 32), that is not true. Stele materials recently discovered verify that only some of the seventeen grades were present in King Yuri's time. The king-centered official rank system had yet to be completed at that point. Department heads ran the system in diversified format departmentally with their own official staff under their command. However, none of the six departments had its own independent official rank system. That titles for official ranks were identical across the departments implies some degree of control by central government. Given that the number of persons in possession of official ranks differed departmentally, the system was independently managed within each department, but under central government regulation for approval of requests through official reports and so forth. In this sense, up until the early sixth century Silla could not yet have established a king-centered uniform official rank system and must have still depended on the official rank system in various formats instead. This is a phenomenon interlocked with the management of politics based on the department system.

Meanwhile, as the legal mandate was promulgated, the *gyeongwi* system,

subdivided into seventeen ranks ranging from *gakgan* to *jowi*, seemed to have achieved its first full incarnation. As the *golpum* system was formalized as an independent part of the legal mandate, regulations concerning the official rank system were also included. The compensatory land allotment system that was probably run in parallel with the *golpum* and official ranks must also have been listed. Heretofore, the meager *gyeongwi* composed of the few ranks was revamped speedily into seventeen ranks by the time of the promulgation of the legal mandate. From that time, the seventeen-rank basic structure remained unchanged. Although it remains unclear why the system was not additionally subdivided, and the significance of the number remains unknown, the seventeen ranks form one of the prominent features of Silla's official rank system. Although more ranks like *daegakgan* and *taedaegakgan* were inserted above the first *gakgan* when needed, they were ad hoc positions, not permanent ones.

Meanwhile, Silla offered the so-called *jungwije* during the unification period as a special outlet for officers whose status had been undercut, while it ran an interlocked *golpum* and *gyeongwi* system. When created, *jungwije* was applicable to only a few official ranks, and this took place only within the basic frame of the seventeen ranks. This clearly reflects the Silla's ruling class' determination to preserve the basic structure of Silla's official seventeen-rank system.

*Jungwije* hints at the fact that the official seventeen-rank system was run largely in the form of several separate groups, in particular *gangun*, the higher group and *nama*, the lower one. The *gangun* rank was further subdivided into *daeachan* and upper subgroups, *achan* and lower subgroups; *nama* group into *nama* itself and two lower groups under *saji*. Although this attests to the fact that official rank was closely related to the *golpum* system, it is attributed to the disparities in their founding courses and foundation of their existence. The official rank system, largely composed only of *gan* and *nama* before their subdivision, was subdivided gradually in parallel with the subdivision of their functions. Of the two chief ranks, the upper grade, *gangun*, was first subdivided quickly, and then *nama* and lower ranks broke down into subdivisions later by the sixth century. As such, a feature of *gyeongwi* was its tendency to subdivide into lower ranks.

Each of these subgroups featured its function and grade at the same time and boundaries were also set between them. Because civil servants were not numerous in the beginning, they were run in combination with the

official ranks. In the interim, as an increasing number of new civil officials were installed in line with the increasing number of civil departments, the administration of the civil service and official ranks was interlocked. Generally speaking, as "Jikgwanji" in the *Samguk sagi* demonstrates, the basic system for the official rank system was established by the time of King Jinpyeong's reign. However, although the official ranks were interlocked with the *golpum* system and the civil service system for their operation, its principles and system evolved gradually through step-by-step processes rather than emerging all at once in King Beopheung's reign. All the while, however, it did not lose its original character.

Meanwhile, *oewi*, the equivalent of *gyeongwi* for the population of Silla's countryside, showed marked differences from the latter in terms of how and when it was established. According to the Silla Monument in Jungseong-ri of Pohang from the year 501, it is obvious that a uniform *oewi* system was yet to emerge, as two systems called *ganji-ilbeol* and *ganji-ilgeumji* coexisted until then. The same is true according to the Silla Monument in Naengsu-ri of Youngil from the year 503. A basic four-grade system, ranging from *ganji*, the highest *wi*, down to *acheok*, for *oewi* was established after the Silla Monument in Bongpyeong, Uljin was built in 524. A legal mandate declared shortly beforehand hints at such an arrangement. Thereafter, as successful wars of conquest resulted in the expansion of territory and subsequent refinement and reinforcement of the ruling system for the provinces, the highest grade, *ganji*, began breaking down into subunits on the basis of four basic grades. *Oewi* features upward subdivision, thus eventually multiplying into eleven subunits all the way up to the highest *wi*, namely, *yakgan*. The subdivision was mainly focused on *ganji*, the higher grade in the *oewi* system, while lower ranks almost remained untouched. This was apparently aimed at luring in local elites.

Management of the *oewi* system is a standard by which one can measure how astutely and systematically Silla ruled its provinces. Although the nature of the status system was also embedded in *oewi*, it was not as intransigent about status as the *golpum* system. For example, locals were also awarded *oewi* status for their active cooperation and military achievements. Silla succeeded in ruling its provinces partially because it made the most of the *oewi* system. However, it was destined to be short-lived with the end of the unification wars among the three Korean kingdoms for its managerial problems. In this sense, *oewi* was a transitional official rank system.

## 2

## Expansion of Territory and Establishment of a New Ruling Order

### King Jinheung's Enthronement and Queen Mother Jiso's Regency

King Beopheung made decisive contributions to Silla's evolution into a centralized aristocratic country by outgrowing the department system. In his later days, he endeavored to propagate Buddhism, by entering the priesthood. Because King Beopheung died in 540 without a male child, his nephew Sammaekjong was crowned at the young age of seven and became King Jinheung (r. 540–576). His enthronement was made possible despite his young age because Silla's ruling class had sufficiently solidified its foundations by this time.

The catch was that King Jinheung was King Beopheung's maternal grandson and also his nephew. Why he was crowned is unclear. King Beopheung's daughter, Jiso, married Ipjong *Galmunwang*. King Jinheung was born of these two. Because Ipjong was King Beopheung's blood brother, this marriage was extremely incestuous. The Petroglyph of Cheonjeon-ri, Petroglyph site in Ulsan depicts King Jinheung's appearance immediately prior to his enthronement.

This petroglyph refers to a huge stone wall located on a tributary of the Taehwa River, Daegok Stream on which mural paintings and numerous Chinese characters are engraved. They indicate that Sabuji *Galmunwang* and his companions inscribed the characters during their visit to the riverside.



Fig 2. Cheonjeon-ri Stone with Inscription of "Eulmyo" in Ulsan

Hence, the name, Seoseokgok (Petroglyph Valley). Sabuji *Galmunwang* was King Jinheung's father, Ipjong. Similarly, fourteen years after her husband's excursion, Lady Jiso, King Jinheung's mother, commemorated her husband's previous excursion at the same place with her mother, Lady Bodo, and her young son, Sammaekbu, by leaving more vestiges with an inscription of more characters next to her husband's on the stone wall. This sparked a surge in the popularity of this riverside and Seoseok Valley, and attracted visits by myriad famous potentates and *Hwarang* cadets. The latters' visits show that it must also have become a popular site for *Hwarang* retreats.

Although no sign of a personal visit by King Beopheung has been found, names like Mujeukji Taewang and Beopheung *Daewang* inscribed on the wall hint that most of those days' powerful royal figures had been there. The year 539 was when King Beopheung died and a year before King Jinheung ascended to the throne. That Ipjong *Galmunwang* did not accompany Lady Jiso on her visit to his earlier excursion site at this time suggests that Ipjong must have already been dead. This is the reason that

the crown was bequeathed to King Jinheung, not to his father.

However, the death of King Jinheung's father might not have been the only reason that he was ruled out of the succession. Although he was also King Jijeung's son, who had been born just after King Beopheung, his occupation and status as *galmunwang*, head of the Satak department, would have been an obstacle to his ascent to the throne through normal channels. Only alumni of the Tak department were eligible to inherit the crown. Although King Jijeung was originally from the Satak department as a former *galmunwang*, enthronement converted him into a Tak department's affiliate, thus making King Beopheung's enthronement possible. Unfortunately for the second son, Ipjong, King Jijeung's pre-crown hereditary rank as the Satak department's *galmunwang* was bequeathed to him. In other words, had it not been for the fall of the department system, King Jinheung could have inherited *galmunwang* rank at best.

On the other hand, King Jinheung's mother was a daughter of a Tak department alumnus, King Beopheung. As such, perhaps King Jinheung's enthronement was justified due to his mother's heritage. Although, as King Beopheung had been promoted to the title of *daewang*, the ruling order of the department system had been disbanded and the importance of one's affiliation no longer strictly applied, King Jinheung's enthronement had to be justified with his affiliation because of his young age. Jiso was able to act as regent for King Jinheung probably because of her convenient hereditary affiliation with the Tak department.

Jiso inaugurated her regency with magnanimous pardons and uniform promotion of civil officials' rank by one grade. All for the purpose of invoking blessings on her regency. However, she appointed Isabu to key positions such as defense minister, for example, to oversee internal and external military affairs in 541, which was equivalent to vesting actual political power in him. In short, Jiso's regency became dependent on Isabu to a great extent.

Because Isabu was closely related by blood to King Jijeung, his blood relationship to King Jijeung's grandson, King Jinheung, was not a distant one. Perhaps he could have given a helping hand to King Jijeung in the latter's battles with King Soji over political power. Furthermore, this means that Isabu shared King Jijeung's political orientation. This is probably why King Jijeung appointed Isabu in his early twenties as the governor for the newly created strategic key region, Siljikju. Both his competence and previously mentioned

personal background were understandably put to good use in his new post. Later, Isabu measured up to King Jijeung's expectation as he expanded territory in his successful northward foray along the coast of the East Sea and eventually even annexed Usanguk in 512. When King Beopheung executed a strategy to attack Geumgwan Gaya located along the lower reaches of the Nakdong River, Isabu's contribution at the head of Silla's army was outstanding. Queen Mother Jiso probably depended on him as much because of his glittering career as for his blood relationship.

In reality, therefore, it was Isabu who actually controlled the political situation at the beginning of King Jinheung's reign. The publication of *Guksa* (National history) shows this fact unequivocally. Isabu made his proposal to define Silla's history out of the necessity to consolidate the king-centered ruling system. To this end, he nominated Geochilbu, a fairly close relative and similarly oriented fellow-royal, as the general supervisor for the publication of the national history. Because no copy of this book is known to have survived, its content is unknown. But kings' lineages from the early period of Silla in the few history books that have survived seem to have been based on the *Guksa*. Strong circumstantial evidence for such a written source comes from the fact that, even when the Kim family's ruling system was established, the king's lineage was not formed exclusively around the Kim family but spanned three separate family names: Bak Hyekgeose as Silla's progenitor and Seok Talhae are mentioned. This is why, despite the later attempt to rearrange the king's lineage into a Kim-centered lineage by the time of unification, the three separate family names for the lineages of Silla's kings could not be denied as they had already been recorded in the aforementioned *Guksa*. In addition, as he stated at the time of his proposal for the publication of the *Guksa*, Isabu's faith in the Confucian philosophical view of documenting history without under or overstatement (*sulibujak*) and that the purpose of national history is to teach successive generations lessons from the past by accurately recording the virtues and vices of kings and vassals must have had the same effect. Furthermore, publication of the *Guksa* shows that Isabu's political knowledge was not to be underestimated.

Isabu set the course for Silla's society of the future through publication of the *Guksa* on the one hand and carried out serious practical measures to cement the foundations of the country on the other hand. A minister for defense was appointed in the fifth year of King Jinheung's reign in 544. Because he himself had already been appointed as minister for the defense department, there

were now two defense ministers in charge. This was a forerunner for later developments whereby multiple appointments were made to the position of minister for all central ministries except for the positions of *Sangdaedeung* in the Daedeung and *sijung* in the Jipsabu. The increasing pressure on the defense ministry given the situation at that time required a sharing of its rapidly expanding military responsibilities. In fact, Isabu, overwhelmed by the increasing responsibilities in administering military and political operations, even had to appoint one more fellow minister to share his defense ministry tasks. Similarly, the Daedang was created as the central government's elite corps. Reform of the military system through the creation of the Daedang corps and an expansion of the defense ministry were initiated. The Daedang as the core of the Silla's military was active later not only in guarding the Silla's king but also in leading wars for territorial expansion. This military policy was put into effect as King Jinheung gambled with his country's fate by advancing to the Han River basin.

Queen mother Jiso granted priesthood to Buddhist monks openly for the first time when King Beopheung's cherished project, the construction of Heungnyun Temple, was completed. She also paved the way for Buddhism and politics to be integrated. Emperor Wu of Liang sent a Buddhist relic with a monk, Gakduk, who was visiting Liang, when he dispatched him to Silla with his emissary in 549. At the time, King Jinheung welcomed the emissary and the monk on the path in front of Heungnyun Temple. Silla was thus readying the ground for its emergence as a Buddhist country.

### King Jinheung's Direct Rule and Advance into the Han River Basin

King Jinheung, crowned at the young age of seven in 540, declared direct rule in the twelfth year of his reign in 551, having only just become an adult. His use of an era name, Gaeguk, was a clear signal of this declaration. Although King Beopheung employed an era name for the first time in 536, the name had remained unchanged throughout King Jinheung's succession. The rule, one era name per king, had not been observed, probably because Queen mother Jiso wanted to continue King Beopheung's policies under her regency. In this light, the abrupt adoption of a new era name upon the declaration of King Jinheung's direct rule appears unusual. It could have been an expression of King Jinheung's desire to implement his own

independent policies. The era name, *Gaeguk* (foundation of the country), is especially intriguing. The seemingly senseless meaning—founding a country in an already time-honored country—reflects King Jinheung's steely resolution on his way to ruling the country directly. In other words, *Gaeguk* is interpreted not conventionally as the foundation of a country, so much as the proactive setting of a new course for a new Silla. This reflects a new young king's energetic ambition to build a new country out of Silla. Thereafter, King Jinheung successfully implemented a range of concrete policies covering a wide range of areas and, in so doing, ushered in the maturing phase of Silla's growth.

King Jinheung first revealed the direction of his drive by visiting Nangseong (present-day Cheongju region) in the year of his declaration of direct rule. This direction had already been set during Queen mother Jiso's regency. Goguryeo had provoked incidents, for example, with the Yemaek tribe as their vanguard in 548 to launch a surprise attack on Baekje's Doksan. Upon Baekje's call for help, King Jinheung immediately dispatched General Juryong with a 3,000-strong force to help Baekje. In retaliation, Baekje attacked Goguryeo's Dosal in 550 while Goguryeo attacked and captured Baekje's Geumhyeon. From that point onwards, the two countries, Goguryeo and Baekje, exhausted their resources for the sake of these two fortresses. As both sides collapsed out of war fatigue, Silla's Isabu opportunistically attacked these two strongholds and captured them. Isabu reinforced both fortresses and stationed 1,000 soldiers to defend them. This was a significant event, not only from Silla's standpoint, but also for all three kingdoms as it implied that Silla could antagonize Baekje as well as Goguryeo. Since the military pact had been created in 433, the relationship between the Silla and Baekje had, despite many twists and turns, been sustained. That was until this incident, which seemed to predict that the two countries would fall out in the near future. The fall of the two fortresses was only the prelude for Silla's advance into the Han River basin. Therefore, King Jinheung's visit to the newly conquered Nangseong region in the first year of his direct rule was one of the actions intended to put his northward policies into effect.

By the time King Jinheung arrived at Nangseong in the course of his royal tour, news had reached him that a music virtuoso, Ureuk, from Daegaya, (which had been assimilated into Silla) and his pupils had relocated to nearby Gukwon (present-day Chungju). The musician was invited to play at Harim Palace at King Jinheung's request. Moved by Ureuk's genius, King Jinheung

commissioned him to teach Gyego, Beopji, and Mandeok in the following year. Ureuk assessed each of the three's talents and, accordingly, taught them to play the *gayageum*, singing, and dancing respectively. Not long after, King Jinheung had all three perform for him, only to find, much to his pleasure, that the quality of their performances matched Ureuk's. He rewarded them generously and wanted to appoint them as state music masters. Some vassals, however, raised their voices in opposition, claiming that as the *gayageum* was an instrument pertaining to the perished state of Gaya, it would be blasphemous for Silla to glorify it as a state musical instrument. King Jinheung strongly refuted this claim, pointing out that Gaya's fate was the result of its king's carnal lust, not because of the *gayageum*, and overrode all objections to appoint all three musicians for the three areas, including *gayageum* musician, as Silla's state music masters. This incident provides an insight into King Jinheung and his excellent grasp of an aspect of Confucian philosophy, *yek* (the balance between stern manners and hedonistic art in pursuit of equilibrium: disciplined, not stern, and pleasant, not debauched), which foreshadowed his later merciful kingship. To sum up, King Jinheung's new Silla under the banner of a new era name, Gaeguk, was cohesively related to a kingship of merciful rule.

In 551, Baekje requested Silla to send its forces to aid Baekje's effort to recover the Han River basin. Silla agreed to the request and dispatched its forces. As a result, the Baekje-led allied forces of three countries, Baekje, Silla, and Gaya, were organized and sent to carry out the Han River basin recovery operation. Although preexisting historical documents state that this was about the time that Silla made attempts to advance to the Han River basin, the Jeokseongbi Monument of Silla in Danyang, built in 550, tells a somewhat different story. Silla had already unilaterally advanced toward the upper Namhan River, then under Goguryeo's rule, before forming an alliance with Baekje. The Jeokseong Monument tells us that it was the acclaimed general Isabu who led this successful foray. In other words, Silla had already been planning and pursuing its independent conquest of the Han River basin. In turn, it means that the aforesaid Silla's conquest of Dosal and Geumhyeon by a single attack was no coincidence. Silla's furtive plans for the conquest of the Han River basin had already been well thought out and prepared step by step in advance. Failing to read Silla's covert intent, Baekje rashly involved Silla in its costly attempt to recover the Han River basin under its leadership. Silla misled Baekje by responding positively to Baekje's demand, while carrying out its own plan against Baekje as well as against Goguryeo.

At the outset, Silla's plan to advance into the Han River basin with the Baekje force saw significant achievements at the hands of eight generals, including Geochilbu. At the time, Goguryeo was greatly distracted externally by destabilizing problems to its north, such as the Gokturks' foundation of their own country, and internally by political infighting. The southern frontier was, therefore, left relatively unattended. Goguryeo's diversion presented Baekje with a decisive opportunity to achieve its dream of revenge, recovery of its former capital region, the Han River basin. As such, Baekje could achieve its planned goal with little sacrifice. Baekje captured not only its former capital city, Hanseong, but also *six gun* (counties), including Pyeongyang (presumed to be today's Namyangju). At the same time, Silla conquered ten gun, presumed to be eastern Gyeonggi-do and the Gangwon-do highlands.

However, Silla, already absorbed in its premeditated plan to acquire the entire Han River basin, covetously sought an opportunity to invade Baekje's jointly conquered six counties. Such covetousness was not seen as unusual in those days, especially because the ten counties Silla had conquered were not as rich as Baekje's six in terms of population and wealth. But there was more to Silla's covetousness than simple envy for Baekje's richer spoils of war. The covetousness emanated from the desire to realize King Jinheung's grand ambition to strengthen his rule over the nation. Also, behind the covetousness lay King Jinheung's plan to carry out trade and diplomacy independently with China without having to go through Baekje. From Silla's point of view this goal of monopolizing the Han River basin was worth the risk of antagonizing even a time-honored ally like Baekje. Therefore, Silla carried out its plan to strike at Baekje's achilles heel, while the latter had lowered its guard. First of all, Silla leaked false intelligence that it had struck a secret pact with Goguryeo. Because Baekje was shaken in the face of such frightening news, it tried to prepare for an attack from both Silla and Goguryeo with a vain request to Wae for military aid. Abandoned, Baekje regretfully withdrew its army from Hanseong in 553. As a result, Silla took possession of the entire Han River basin, previously occupied by Baekje, without shedding a single drop of blood.

Silla named the whole Han River basin Sinju and appointed Kim Yusin's grandfather, Kim Muryeok, who had contributed to the war through many military accomplishments, as the first governor. The naming of the Han River Basin, defined as a new province, as Sinju appears to be significant. This is

because the Han River basin was new territory, completely different from the Nakdong River basin and the East Sea coast in terms of its character. A layer of meaning to match the era name, Gaeguk, was embedded in the new land. It was definitely equivalent to a timely declaration of a new era. A new situation, markedly different from the previous situation for the interrelationship among the Three Kingdoms, had dawned.

### **Victory in the Gwansanseong Campaign and Dawning of a New Era**

Regretfully, Baekje temporarily withdrew from its hard-won territory around the Han River basin, judging that it would be a sitting duck in the face of a hostile Goguryeo and Silla allied force. They opted not to fight Silla head-on in order to strategically prepare for the future. Because the two countries did not go to war, their alliance was not rescinded. Baekje wanted to retain its alliance with Silla unbroken, retreating peacefully while taking time to prepare for future retaliation. In order to assure Silla's further allegiance to their military pact, Baekje's King Seong offered King Jinheung his daughter as his concubine. By doing so, Baekje intended to rid Silla of any grounds for suspecting that Baekje held a grudge against them.

However, Silla was not so gullible as to accept Baekje's charm offensive at face value. It simply played along on the surface, while also hurrying behind the scenes to take measures against the approaching provocation. The completion of renovation work on Myeonghwal Fortress in the seventh lunar month, 554, was a case in point. On the recently discovered Monument of the Construction of Myeonghwal Fortress, we read that the renovation work had begun through the mobilization of people across the country from 554. Silla wanted to build an impenetrable defense line against a surprise counterattack from Goguryeo as a back-up plan in case Silla's foray into the Han River basin launched about this time turned out to be unsuccessful. The ongoing renovation work was completed in 554. However, what had started in Silla's minds as something aimed at Goguryeo ended up at Myeonghwal Fortress aimed at Baekje. This reflects the soaring tensions around the Three Kingdoms.

As Silla had expected, Baekje launched an overwhelming attack by the time the renovation work for Myeonghwal Fortress was completed. Baekje tried all-out war because it calculated that Silla would defend the Han River basin including its own capital at all costs. For Baekje, it was a make or

**Fig 3. Jakseongbi Monument of Myeonghwal sanseong Fortress in Gyeongju**



break war. Of course, there were quite a lot of voices in Baekje opposing a major war against Silla. Responsibility for the failure to secure the Han River basin was still being apportioned and the finance needed for another major war would be unaffordably enormous. While senior vassals gave prudent advice to wait for a more promising future opportunity, the restless Prince Yeochang in his late twenties made a hasty and hardline decision for a swift war. Yeochang, the crown prince who wielded the actual power at that time and would soon succeed the aged King Seong, had his way on this issue. Baekje staged a premature war against Silla with its 30,000 strong elite force still recovering from its previous failed war to secure the Han River basin.

Baekje's army under Prince Yeochang's general command did not march to cross Yuksimnyeon or Pallyangchi directly enroute to Iksan and Namwon, but marched northward by detouring slightly via Okcheon toward

Chupungnyeong or further north toward Hwaryeong. This tactic could have been intended to check the movement of Silla's army around Sinju. Yeochang's army, which embarked upon this war with a high morale, initially stormed Silla's strategic key fortress, Gwansanseong, and its surrounding region. Silla's defense efforts led by Udeok, Tamji and other generals were in vain. Under pressure of time, Silla diverted its army under Kim Muryeok from the Han River basin to Gwansanseong to help it in its crisis.

Prince Yeochang, basking in the glory of his victory at the battle of Gwansanseong, rapidly sent the news of his victory to his father, the king, in Sabi. Upon hearing the news of victory, King *Seong* travelled to the war front to comfort the war-fatigued Baekje army. As King *Seong* hastened to the front, he failed to check the situation around the area before moving but took the fastest route to the front with only a minimum number of guards. It turned out to be a fatal mistake. On the king's journey, a battalion belonging to Dodo, a member of the local elite from Samnyeonsan-gun, set an ambush near Gwansanseong by the order of Kim Muryeok and captured the Baekje king. It was an appalling, unforeseeable incident.

The captured king was brought to the main camp of Kim Muryeok's army. Kim Muryeok justified sentencing the Baekje king to death by accusing Baekje of war crimes. Baekje's preemptive attack was denounced as a violation of a time-honored alliance, thus justifying the death sentence. The king's head was brought to the Silla's capital and his body returned to Baekje. Baekje was demoralized by this news. Prince Yeochang managed to evacuate the battlefield with only a few soldiers as he came under ferocious attack. Most of Baekje's elite forces were lost. In the end, Silla came out of the Gwansanseong campaign as an absolute, unequivocal victor. Baekje was so devastated by this battle that it was not sure how long it would take to recuperate from this defeat. For Silla, the campaign was a game changer that ushered in a new era.

The Gwansanseong campaign was not exclusively a confrontation between Baekje and Silla. Gaya and Wae (Japan) made token contributions with a minimal number of soldiers to form an alliance. As such, for Silla, Gaya, which was in a quasi Baekje-led alliance, had been a thorn in its side. As Baekje was in deep turmoil as a result of King *Seong*'s death and the fiasco of the Gwansanseong campaign, Silla capitalized on the victorious momentum of the Gwansanseong campaign to carry out a full-scale offensive against Gaya.

King Jinheung took orderly steps to launch the offensive against Gaya. He positioned the regional capital in Bisabeol near the Nakdong River by separating Haju (the lower province) from Sangju (the upper province). He then made a royal tour all the way up to Mt. Bukhan, so that not only would he boost the morale of the population of the newly merged regions, but he could also observe Goguryeo's movements. At the same time, he relocated the regional capital for the East Sea coast from Gangneung to far northern Biyeolhol. This move was also intended to encroach to a considerable extent upon Goguryeo's rule over its southernmost territory. In addition, the regional capital for Sangju was relocated from Sangju to Gammun and another regional capital for Sinju for the Han River basin was relocated further north to Mt. Bukhan. The relocation of Silla's regional capitals was intended to expand its territory in the direction of the relocation while keeping watchful eyes on Goguryeo's movements, and also to position its forces to attack Gaya to the west from the Nakdong River. For example,

**Fig 4. Bibong Peak of Bukhansan Mountain and Monument on Bukhansan Mountain Commemorating the Border Inspection by King Jinheung (replica)**

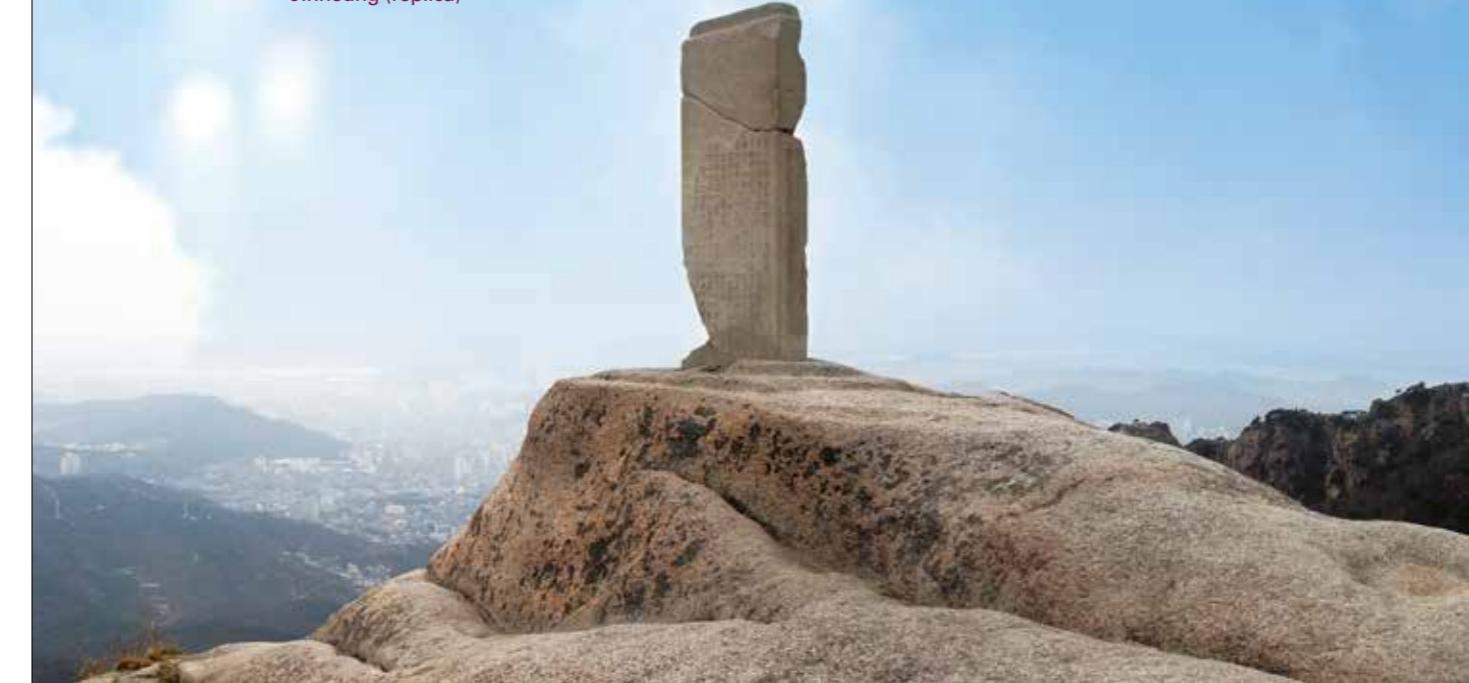




Fig 5. Territorial Expansion of Silla during the Reign of King Jinheung

Silla would block Baekje's aid and close on Gaya from the directions of the newly located regional capitals of Sangju and Gammun. On the other hand, Silla's main forces would be positioned in Bisabul in order to march directly across the Nakdong River. By doing so, Silla tried to strategically isolate Alla and Gara (Daegaya), the respective centers of power for northern and southern Gaya, from each other.

Silla first brought down Alla, the weaker of the two, and immediately bore down on Gara. By doing so, Silla conquered all of Gaya in 562, and it has been relegated to history ever since. We can read from the Monument in Changnyeong Commemorating the Border Expansion by King Jinheung of Silla that not only Silla's main forces, but also governors' forces from all across the country, joined in the war of conquest on Gaya, reflecting Silla's serious commitment to this war.

Silla realized its long-cherished wish to conquer the Han River basin and Gaya in the Nakdong River basin during King Jinheung's reign. Moreover, Silla significantly expanded its territory by marching even further northward. The Mt. Bukhan Monument, Maullyeong Monument, and Hwangchoryeong Monument echo this fact loudly and clearly. King Jinheung's symbolic term for his direct rule, Gaeguk, came true. Meanwhile, Silla debuted on the international stage when King Jinheung sent an emissary to Northern Qi in 564. The following year, Northern Qi bestowed a title on Silla's king, Naknanggungong Sillawang. That King Jinheung had started using his family name, Kim, without reservation, reflects those days' optimistic mood prompted by the conferring of the title by China. The status of Silla's king had been acknowledged on the international stage. A new era dawned when the domain of Korea narrowed down to the three equally developed Korean kingdoms in and beyond the Korean Peninsula, as the late starter Silla evolved to stand shoulder to shoulder with its earlier established peers, Goguryeo and Baekje.

### Establishment of Hwangnyongsa Temple and the Chakravartin (Ideal Universal Ruler) Model

King Jinheung began to feel the urge to revamp Silla's internal systems to match his recent achievements in conquering the Han River basin. He started with a civil engineering project to expand and improve his palace. This was the way that the significantly bolstered king's authority was

demonstrated the most effectively. To this end, he originally wanted to erect a new palace to the east of Wolseong. However, legend has it that a yellow dragon appeared at the site reserved for the new palace and, as a result, a temple, not a palace, was built on that same site.

As a result, the temple on the palace site was—significantly—named Hwangnyongsa Temple (黃龍寺) after the yellow dragon. However, the first character for the temple's name was changed from the character for 'yellow (黃)' to the character for 'emperor (皇)', and the latter has been the official name ever since. There seems, however, to have been a profound intent behind the change of the temple's name. Among the five colors yellow refers to the center, thus often being employed to mean "emperor."



Fig 6. Hwangnyongsa Temple Site after excavation

In this sense, the site of Hwangnyongsa Temple is the center of the world, thus promoting its ruler to the status of an emperor. For this reason, Hwangnyongsa Temple played a central role in Silla's Buddhism and in its operations gave the impression of being closely related to Silla's king for a long time.

As the inscription “the omniscient ruler” on Changnyeong Monument shows, Silla had its own awareness of its territory. Therefore, the ruler of such a world, Silla's king, perceived himself as being an emperor. The intention in constructing a new palace was an overt expression of such a perception. The change of the temple's name to another Chinese character also speaks volumes about such an intent. In turn, Hwangnyongsa Temple began functioning as a central ground for Silla's king to amicably engage with Buddhism.

Another reason that the new palace site was turned into a temple site might also be that the site was not ideal for a residence. At the time, the people of Silla called the northern side of Hwangnyongsa Temple the dragon palace. It was given this name because it was an area of low ground, always swamped with seeping ground water. As such, a requirement for the foundations of the new palace involved the tremendous task of filling the low marshy area with earth. This initial plan, however, took a sudden dramatic turn midway. Why a fable about a yellow dragon was invented as a justifiable cause for an abrupt change in such a gargantuan public work is incomprehensible. There may have been more to it than an attempt to reformulate it later in the form of a myth.

The construction of the Hwangnyongsa Temple was a time-consuming project, spanning the years 553 (14th year of King Jinheung's reign) to 566. It was resource consuming, especially when compared to what it had taken to build the first temple in Silla, Heungnyunsa Temple. This reflects the complexity of the purpose behind the construction. That two of the three national treasures at that time were placed in Heungnyunsa Temple speaks volumes about the political significance of its construction. That the temple's master priest played a role as a president for Silla's Buddhism as well is just another sign of the temple's political significance.

Considering the facts discussed above, we can suspect a strong underlying political motivation for the abrupt change of the site from that for a new palace to that for a temple. It appears that pragmatic considerations regarding the projection of authority through a majestic palace got the better

of formal ones. The recently approved Buddhism that had begun deepening its roots as a base ideology for the recently launched new era was to be fully utilized for political purposes vis-à-vis the king's highly strengthened authority. The king's status could not be firmly planted without a deeply rooted political ideology. Simply because Buddhism was officially approved did not necessarily mean that it would be suitably positioned as a base for a political ideology. In this regard, King Jinheung, following the construction of Heungnyunsa Temple, embarked on the focused construction of a ruling ideology. In addition to the foundation of Heungnyunsa Temple and approval of the Buddhist priesthood, he took one more step forward to create a Buddhist official post, Daeseoseong in 550. Daeseoseong was a monk who acted as the king's counselor. The creation of this position is interpreted as a significant deepening of the relationship between Buddhism and politics. However, the creation of the Daeseoseong post alone was not adequate to guarantee the preservation of the king's significantly enhanced authority. Conversion of the palace site into a temple site was to add weight to the efforts to cement the already much-strengthened king's authority.

However, the level of understanding of Buddhism in Silla at that time was not very high. Focusing in particular on the fact that the purpose of the site for a new palace altered abruptly, a special factor seems to have played a role. A Buddhist monk called Hyeryang fled from Goguryeo to Silla to seek asylum. He escaped Goguryeo and accompanied Geochilbu to Silla when Silla succeeded in conquering the Han River basin in 551. Geochilbu's friendship with Hyeryang dated back to those days when the former, having entered the Buddhist priesthood, wandered into Goguryeo's territory, only to come across Hyeryang in the middle of a lecture on Buddhism. Having recognized the latter's competence, Geochilbu recommended him to King Jinheung as soon as he came back home. King Jinheung installed and appointed Hyeryeong to the new high but ceremonial position for a Buddhist priest, Guktong. Hyeryeong was referred to not only as the Buddhist president, but also as a temple's master monk, probably because he had initially been appointed as head of what was then the one and only Buddhist temple, Heungnyun Temple. If King Jinheung switched the purpose of the new palace site to one for Buddhism for the purpose of properly applying Buddhism to politics, it was probably the Buddhist president Hyeryeong's idea. King Jinheung incorporated Hyeryeong's opinion into his decision to change the purpose of the site. By doing so, the

linchpin between Buddhism and politics was put in place. As a result, some aspects of Goguryeo's Buddhism, or Northern Qi's Buddhism via Goguryeo, were incorporated into Silla's Buddhism.

The fact that Heungnyunsa Temple took so much time to be completed attests to its considerable significance as well as its great scale. That the master monk for Heungnyunsa Temple was also Silla's highest ranking Buddhist official is also telling. King Jinheung seems to have used Heungnyunsa Temple as leverage to proactively utilize Buddhism for a political purpose according to Hyeryeong's opinions. After all, King Jinheung chose to model himself on the Chakravartin (ideal universal ruler).

Chakravartin exemplifies the close ties between Buddhism and Silla. Chakravartin is the term for an ideal universal ruler in Buddhist scripture who created a Buddhist country by building an empire through the expansion of territory and governing people according to Buddhist laws. Expansion of territory here is a metaphor for the propagation of Buddhism. Four chariot wheels, respectively called the gold, silver, bronze, and iron wheels, symbolize the Chakravartin's absolute power and authority. King Ashoka of the Maurya Empire, an ancient Indian empire, was considered to be a model Chakravartin. The Chakravartin concept was embraced in the Northern and Southern dynasties era in China, and the Northern Wei dynasty, which ardently employed Buddhism as its ruling ideology, created a ritual called the "King is Buddha." Just as Emperor Wu of Liang in the Southern dynasties set up such a ritual, Baekje also made a similar attempt. For example, King Seong's title grew from efforts to adopt the "King is Buddha" ritual. King Jinheung's pursuit of the Chakravartin ideal was just another example.

King Jinheung named his first son Dongnyun and his second son Saryun. This naming itself attests that King Jinheung wished to embody the Chakravartin ideal. This is inferred from the fact that King Jinheung regarded himself as a golden wheel king. For instance, as the Hwangchoryeong and Maallyeong Monuments show, King Jinheung toured border regions symbolically in the company of two monks. Moreover, a story that King Jinheung created a huge Buddha statue as a central Buddha statue for Heungnyunsa Temple using materials left over from the failed attempt by Ashoka (publicly acknowledged as a typical Chakravartin-type king) to sculpt his Buddha statue, highlights the fact that King Jinheung prided himself on surpassing even King Ashoka as a Chakravartin. However, the story realistically reflects King Jinheung's sense of victory over his rival

in Baekje, who would also have liked to embody the Chakravartin ideal before King Jinheung. Besides, a story that the huge central Buddha statue in Hwangnyongsa Temple wet its feet with tears foretelling King Jinheung's death in the subsequent year attests that the huge central Buddha statue itself was thought to be King Jinheung. The king faithfully carried out the ritual in honor of the "King is Buddha" principle and Heungnyunsa Temple was the center for such patriotic Buddhism. A legend that a son of a deity encountered by Jajang, Hobupryeong, resided in Hwangnyongsa Temple is a clear reflection of such patriotic Buddhism. As such, a decision to reassign a site for a palace as a site for a temple reflects attempts to substantialize the "King is Buddha" principle.

However, there was also a practical reason for the relocation of the royal palace: Wolseong had reached its maximum capacity. No more room for accommodation or storage was available. Therefore, cancellation of the construction of a new palace placed enormous pressure on Wolseong. Although the political center was removed to Hwangnyongsa Temple, Wolseong as a royal family residence had to be refurbished. Gradual changes started appearing. Wolseong began expanding from the inside out to compensate for its lack of space. For example, a moat surrounding Wolseong was utilized for purposes other than the defense of the castle.

A part of the defensive moat around Wolseong was channeled via a southern stream and the rest artificially. Excavation shows that the moat around Wolseong had been gradually narrowing as its defensive purpose became marginalized. The basic purpose of the moat was being abandoned. Of course, the deterioration of a moat intended for defense amounts to a change in Wolseong itself, a fundamental change, because its capacity to fully function as a royal palace was transformed. That names for various sections of the palace such as the main palace or the great palace show up in the records hints at this fact. Centering on Wolseong as the main or great palace, many extra palaces like the eastern palace, the northern palace, and the southern palace were built outside it to form a complex to complement the main palace. Because King Jinheung gave up on the idea of building another new palace on top of Wolseong, the overall structure of the royal palace itself changed. Moreover, expansion of the preexisting Wolseong or the plan for building a new palace was translated into experimental changes in the city plan for the kingdom's capital, because the plan for the new palace in particular could probably have been applied to the plan for the capital city.

At the turn of the sixth century, the rapid growth of the Silla state was translated into a ballooning population and expanding political and economic responsibilities, thus making it very difficult for the preexisting royal palace and capital to cope with the waves of Silla's development. In fact, harbingers of such an upheaval had already begun surfacing in the fifth century. As governors were posted in provinces and *uyeok* (local messenger offices) were installed to strengthen central rule over provinces, secured material, and human resources flooded into the kingdom's capital. The preexisting system was already exposing the limits of its capacity, though some measures to increase this capacity were already being taken. For example, the *bangri* system (city plan) was adopted and a government store for the easy distribution of merchandise was opened. In the same vein, the eastern government's store was opened in the sixth century. The time arrived when not only the royal palace but also the royal capital had to adjust itself accordingly. That even the royal tomb for King Beopheung was erected not in Daedeungwon in the middle of the city but in an area on the city's outskirts underscores the administration's intention to re-coordinate the city plan for the kingdom's capital.

In fact, the city structure and transport network that had naturally evolved in the course of the formation of the Silla' state could not contain the rising population and the required economic and administrative organizations. The new city plan initiated by the plan for the new palace had to be adjusted to incorporate the construction of Hwangnyongsa Temple as a centerpiece. The tendency was that as King Jinheung wished to embody the Chakravartin ideal, the center of political gravity was being moved to Hwangnyongsa Temple. Detached palaces were built around Wolseong and government offices surrounded the palace complex. The need for an urban network for stable and systematic accommodation, management, and distribution of human and material resources arose at the same time. This necessity gave birth to the *bang* system. "*bang*" refers to a square shape and a department designed to ensure the orderly application of regular building standards. Although the records indicate that the *bang* system was adopted in King Jabi's reign, only a minor unit of the department *ri* system seems to have been set up at the time. In fact, the idea of the square-shaped *bang* as the smallest unit for the entire royal capital had not arisen before the new palace was planned in King Jinheung's reign. This was only because the city plan for Silla's capital ended up incorporating Hwangnyongsa Temple

as its centerpiece as a result of the site designated for the new palace being transferred to Hwangnyongsa Temple. As a result, occupying the center of the kingdom's capital, the temple became the central landmark for the city and, furthermore, assumed the function of directing all of Silla, politically and religiously. This meant that King Jinheung reigned not only as a political ruler, but also as a religious ruler.

### Recruiting a New Type of Human Resource and the Foundation of Hwarangdo

Suitable human resources were required above all to effectively realize King Jinheung's ambitious recreation of the Silla' state implied in his declaration, *Gaeguk*. Individuals still attached to the previous department system were standing in the way of the establishment of a deeply rooted king-centered aristocratic country. Instead of the six departments or their departmental heads, individuals now pledged their lives and loyalty to the state of Silla or the Silla king. The king's aim was to rule by kingship and, as previously mentioned, the legal mandate was the systematic instrument intended to meet this purpose.

Silla needed a permanent instrument with which to sustain its ruling system as well as the king's regal authority. This, of course, required well-trained civil officials. The systematic renovation of key offices like the Sangdaedeung and the defense ministry was already under way but the personnel that could operate such offices was lacking. Those with experience in the previous system were no longer fit to lead in the new era: the need for a new breed of human resources had arisen.

Under the previous *bu* (department) system, each autonomous department trained its own individuals to fill its own need for human resources. This method was deeply rooted in the operation of traditional communities. Discontinuation of the six-department system demanded a new system to recruit human resources with a new orientation for new organizations. The Wonhwa system was an attempt to meet such a demand and was organized by putting numbers of female leaders as symbolic leaders in a position of prominence and using them to recruit young applicants. In fact, Queen Mother Jiso had earlier headed the effort to cultivate new human resources during her regency. A young and pretty

woman, whose title was "Wonhwa," she recruited hundreds of young male children and educated and trained them to be human resources. The state tried to pick competent individuals from this pool as public servants or military officers. This system was referred to as the Wonhwa system.

However, controversy erupted because Wonhwa, as the center of gravity of the organization, was a woman and, to make matters worse, there were many women leaders. The school was organized into two teams in an original attempt to promote constructive competition that would lead to even sharper honing of students' talents. However, a dispute arose between two of these leaders, Nammo and Junjeong, which resulted in the latter's secret murder of the former. This incident reveals how many trials and errors it took to develop new institutions designed to cultivate a new generation of human resources. The tragic failure of the Wonhwa system led to much soul-searching in Silla, thus deferring the quest for the establishment of new educational institutions for human resources for a while.

Hwarangdo was born quite a while after the demise of the Wonhwa system. *Hwarang*, a male leader, was the center of gravity. Because "*Hwarang*" refers to an attractive boy who wore make-up, Wonhwa's influence was still lingering. As such a similarity between the Hwarangdo and Wonhwa systems is apparent, because the institution was not imposed but based on voluntary mebership, the number of teams for its constituents were not restricted either. This was a measure specifically adopted with the ill-fated Wonhwa system in mind. Specific measures for the management of the *Hwarang* system were clear. The state did not control the foundation of the organization. Instead, it backed up the organization from the behind the scenes in order to highlight its voluntary aspect. In this sense, the *Hwarang* system should not be referred to as being a purely governmental organization but rather a half-private and half-national organization.

The specific date for the foundation of the *Hwarang* system is unclear. *Samguk sagi* records indicate the later period of King Jinheung's reign (r. 37, 576) but given that a *Hwarang* called Sadaham showed up in 562 during Silla's attack on Daegaya, the foundation of *Hwarang* can be no later than this. *Samguk yusa* records an individual called Seol Wollang as the first *Hwarang*, but all we can say for sure is that the exact date when the *Hwarang* system was founded is hard to pin down. However, an acclaimed vassal in King Jinheung's reign, Geochilbu, is also noteworthy because his childhood education evokes the educational content of the *Hwarang* system.

Geochilbu's career is interesting because he had entered the Buddhist priesthood before he began his career as a public official. At that time, while he wandered across the country, he crossed the border into Goguryeo and encountered Hyeryang, who persuaded him to attend his lecture on Buddhism. Back home, Geochilbu entered into his civil official career as an adult. A number of intellectuals, including monks who had met Geochilbu during his countrywide tour, were gathered to participate in the publication of the national history, *Guksa*. His childhood experience thus turned out to be a great advantage.

A close look at Geochilbu's practical experiences shows a striking resemblance with those of the Hwarangdo. The *Hwarang* learned topography and terrain by heart as they polished their knowledge of moral justice and entertained themselves with songs during their tours through famous spots, including mountains and rivers. By doing so, they cooperated and bonded with one another, all the while cultivating their talents by training their bodies and minds and by enjoying the arts. Conspicuously, the entire country was the school for their education. Their countrywide schooling through hands-on experiences must have come in very useful for their later military activities. Whether such schooling took place on an individual or group basis is not known, but Geochilbu had accumulated experiences similar to the *Hwarang*'s before he entered into his career as a public official, specifically, he had already entered the priesthood and had encountered Hyeryang.

Hwarangdo consisted of its symbolic representative, Hwarang, and its constituents, Nangdo. All of them were young males aged between fifteen and nineteen and included monks. These were probably not trainee monks (*samiseung*) but official monks (*biguseung*) who had been approved by the state to enter the priesthood. This was because the Buddhist priesthood benefited from tax exemptions and labor/draft exemptions and, accordingly, monks affiliated with Hwarangdo had to be adults. While they formed part of the Hwarangdo, they were instructors, not students. As teachers, each monk in the Hwarangdo had the suffix "sa" in his name. These monks were from the top intellectual level of society at the time and taught young members of the Hwarangdo. The educational content comprised basic disciplines like Buddhist scriptures. They were assigned to Hwarangdo only through the state's approval. In this sense alone, the Hwarangdo organization was not that of a purely private organization.

Hwarangdo's monks, who while teaching their students evaluated their merits such as their strengths and weaknesses, competence, and right or wrong deeds, also assumed responsibility for recommending their students to the state upon request by incorporating their evaluations into personnel decisions. Later, a true bone aristocrat, Kim Daemun, wrote *Hwarang segi* (Hwarang biographies), in which the author gave a very positive overall evaluation of the Hwarangdo, commenting that wise counselors and loyal vassals selected from the *Hwarang* system stood out and that the system had produced good generals and brave soldiers. This implies that the teaching monks in the *Hwarang* system did their job well.

Added to incidents from Geochilbu's early personal history, such as his rich experiences during his priesthood travels, his encounter with Hyeryang, and his and Hyeryang's joint proposal for the construction of Hwangnyongsa Temple and the decision to model it on the Chakravartin ideal, it is possible that it was another proposal of Geochilbu and Hyeryang's that gave birth to the Hwarangdo. As the fable about Jinjasa and Misirang, monks of Heungnyun Temple, suggests, the people of Silla believed that *Hwarang* was an incarnation of the Maitreya, a Buddha who will appear as a savior in the future. But the people of Silla thought that Maitreya had turned up in Silla disguised as a Hwarang. This belief was based on their expectation and wish that the *Hwarang* would make it possible to realize Silla's dream that Maitreya's world would come true within their lifetime. Maitreya's world matches King Jinheung's ideal world, who also saw himself as a Chakravartin. In this sense, *Hwarang* embodied the ideal human resource who would play a driving role in the realization of King Jinheung's version of Silla as an ideal state, and Hwarangdo was the organization through which this would be achieved. What King Jinheung wished for through the cultivation of a new type of human resource was the establishment of a new country, namely Gaeguk.

Hwarangdo, therefore, was a new organization whose creation King Jinheung entrusted to Geochilbu and Hyeryang, once again on the basis of the latter's credit, won through successful delivery of their first proposal, the erection of Hwangnyongsa Temple, under King Jinheung's direct rule. How Sadaham, who joined the military expedition to conquer Gaya soon after the foundation of the Hwarangdo, behaved set the precedent for model behavior. Hwarangdo was not to recruit and graduate just one group of students, it was to recruit new groups and graduate them

continually. As Hwarangdo organizations multiplied, gradually and naturally competition among them took place. Each organization had its own traits and orientation, reflected in its name. Kim Yusin's Hwarangdo was named Yonghwahyangdo and emphasized faith in Maitreya. Hwarangdo had its own directory called *huwanggwon* or *pungnyu huwanggwon*. Once a member became an adult and left the organization to join the government, his name was expunged, but his place was taken by a new member. In this way the organization was continuously renewed from generation to generation.

Hwarangdo was an organization created to produce the human resources required to mould King Jinheung's new Silla. As the teaching monks, the king's Buddhist name, and King Jinheung's Chakravartin rituals show, realization of the ideal world was the goal of the Hwarangdo. However, their education was not confined to Buddhism, but included ideas such as allegiance to their country, filial duty to their parents and trust among friends as basic virtues. In other words, whilst in pursuit of the Buddhist Maitreya's world, Hwarangdo incorporated the required virtues for real political society. In this sense, Hwarangdo manifested a strong Confucian character under a Buddhist skin. As time passed, it was the realistic rather than the religious characteristics that came to dominate. It seems that Hwarangdo had been a transitional measure for the cultivation of human resources before the pursuit of full-scale kingship-based ruling pursuant to the Confucian political ideology was embarked upon to usher in a new era. This is the reason why, from the mid-period on, Hwarangdo deteriorated and Gukhak [national academyl, an educational institution based on Confucian scriptures, rose fast.

# 3

## Establishment of a Bureaucratic System

### Failure of the Crown Prince Designation System and the Enthronement of King Jinpyeong

King Jinheung more or less accomplished the basic goals set out at the beginning of his direct rule. To give some obvious examples, he built up the human and material resources base significantly by expanding the national territory threefold; he established an ideological base by founding Hwangnyongsa Temple; and he laid the foundation for the cultivation of human resources for the new era by founding the Hwarangdo. That Silla debuted on the East Asian international stage independently in 564 was a flexing of its muscles that was only possible because of its previous experiences. It was a signal that Silla would act as a full constituent of East Asia. In this sense, it is no exaggeration to say that the foundation for the Three Kingdoms' unification was laid at this time.

Now King Jinheung had to turn his attention to securing what he had won. Above all, the most urgent and useful matter was to assimilate the newly acquired population into Silla through the systematic management of provinces while the ruling system was being stabilized. The *Juchi* (the provincial capital) was relocated based on the needs of the new population, and control over *chollak* (villages) was intensified through moving the local people. Meanwhile, Buddhist services were actively supported and

scriptures were enthusiastically acquired for the wide propagation of Buddhism. From the year 564, emissaries were dispatched to either the Southern Dynasty or the Northern Dynasty in China almost annually. This means that interest in international diplomacy based on improved domestic conditions had increased. The experiences of those days acted as a stimulant to growth, in which Silla reacted sensitively to international situations and utilized them to its advantage to ultimately triumph in the Three 'Kingdoms' unification war.

To fit such underlying policies, the era name was changed to Taechang, meaning "triggering of great prosperity." This was an expression of the desire to stabilize domestic conditions. The last, but not the least, step towards this goal was to figure out how to deal with the issue of the succession to King Jinheung's throne, because who would succeed and how would hugely affect the fate of the newly launched Silla state as well as the king's own accomplishments. King Jinheung, therefore, showed great interest in the issue of the crown prince.

King Jinheung appointed his first son, Dongnyun, as the crown prince in 566, the twenty-seventh year of his reign. The selection of a crown prince was not only to train the crown prince as the next king, but also to prevent possible disputes over the succession to the throne. It was the first appointment of a crown prince in Silla. Up until this point, the issue of succession had been problematic because either there had been no such thing as the appointment of a crown prince or it had never become a firmly established precedent. This was a natural result of the lack of a properly established royal authority. The established custom was that the succession to the throne was decided upon by a consultative body made up of "king-makers" entitled *gugin*. King Jinheung's appointment of a crown prince during his reign was an unprecedented attempt to stabilize the system for succession to the throne by personally appointing a crown prince, made possible because his policies had been immensely successful.

King Jinheung made an official declaration that he would bequeath his throne peacefully by appointing the crown prince, but Crown Prince Dongnyun died suddenly six years later in 572. King Jinheung's original intent seemed to have been defeated and there is no record of whether a new crown prince was appointed or not. Because King Jinheung had a second son, Saryun, and the deceased crown prince also had a son, King Jinheung might have considered both of them before making his final

decision. This planted the seed for a dispute over the legitimacy of King Jinji (576–579) who succeeded King Jinheung.

That the era name was changed from Taechang to Hongje, meaning "large salvation," only a few months before Crown Prince Dongnyun's death, must have been of significance. It had only been four years since the first era name was changed to Taechang. The era name, Hongje, expresses the desire to save and soothe over a wide range. This could mean that the then crown prince was thought to be trained to inherit the throne.

However, the unforeseen tragedy of the crown prince's death took place. King Jinheung must have suffered quite a shock. He hosted a seven-day long Buddhist ritual to commemorate Silla's warriors killed in action at wesa. What the term wesa here indicates is not clear, but it could refer to all the temples outside the kingdom's capital. This means that the ritual was a memorial service to commemorate all Silla's warriors who had sacrificed their lives for their country. Perhaps King Jinheung thought that because he had not comforted Silla's warriors' souls earlier, he had been punished by the loss of his own child. King Jinheung lamented his son's death through the Buddhist ritual and agonized over the choice of the next successor to his throne. In the following year, King Jinheung had a huge Buddha statue called Jangnyuk sculpted in his own image at tremendous cost and effort. It may also have been another effort by the king to ease the pain of losing his son and the failure to secure the succession.

King Jinheung died in August 576. He was interred near the tomb of King Beopheung, indicating that he was King Beopheung's legitimate successor. King Jinheung's second son, Saryun, succeeded to the throne as King Jinji. Because King Jinji was relatively young, and there was also a twist in the process of the succession (ramifications of the crown prince's death), the new king's foothold was very shaky. As a result, a seasoned politician, Geochilbu, was inaugurated as Sangdaedeung to assist King Jinji. There seems to be an indication that the position of Sangdaedeung had remained unoccupied for some time, possibly since an individual named Chulbu had been appointed in 531. In this sense, Geochilbu's inauguration as Sangdaedeung amounted to a resurrection of the office. That it was Geochilbu himself who was appointed as a "resurrected" Sangdaedeung implies that King Jinji's succession to the throne was somewhat problematic.

As a result, King Jinji's ascent to the throne created an eerie atmosphere in Silla's domestic affairs. Baekje's timely offensive, as if Baekje had read

Silla's mind, added to the anxiety. King Jinji died in the middle of this ongoing uncertainty in 579, the fourth year of his reign. He did not die of natural causes. The *gugin* (king-makers) dethroned King Jinji because his policies were confused and dissipated, according to the *Samguk yusa*. "Dissipation" here implies that King Jinji was dethroned because of a fault that he had himself committed. If confused policies led to King Jinji's dissipation or vice versa is not clear, but we can be sure that both were present during his reign and led to his being dethroned and killed by the *gugin* in the fourth year of his reign. "*Gugin*" here refers to constituents of the so-called Hwabaek Council, a council of nobles. King Jinji's dethronement seems to have been formally decided upon after frantic debates in the Hwabaek Council. Geochilbu, who presided over the council, assumed responsibility for the dethronement and stepped down from his position as Sangdaedeung.

In fact, problems during King Jinji's reign were foreshadowed by a stuttering process regarding the succession to the throne, caused by Crown Prince Dongnyun's death. King Jinji was dethroned and killed because an ember of an earlier controversy surrounding Dongnyun's death was reignited. Because internal affairs spiraled into controversy after the suspicious death of the crown prince, Jinji did not care to attend to politics and instead indulged in sexual pleasures. How King Jinji indulged in carnal lust is suggested by fables such as that of Dohwanyeo (桃花女), in which a married woman was coveted. King Jinji's sexual affairs out of wedlock seem to have provoked scandal.

Following the dethronement and death of King Jinji, King Jinpyeong (579–632), son of the dead Crown Prince Dongnyun, ascended to the throne. King Jinpyeong's enthronement also meant that the crown was returned to King Jinheung's direct lineage. Although many scholars interpret the aforementioned facts as evidence of confrontation and dispute between the Dongnyun and Saryun factions, King Jinheung's internal lineage had not yet in fact become that divided. For instance, King Jinji's son, Yongchun, was raised in the palace under King Jinpyeong's protection and was later appointed as Naeseong responsible for overall management of the palace. Accordingly, the major confrontation at that time is more properly interpreted as a struggle between one faction in favor of monarch-centered power and an opposing faction in favor of sustaining the traditional aristocrat's right to power sharing. Faction members seeking

the reinstatement of the department system for a share of power were not yet extinct; they had merged into the new system but were alert to every opportunity to reemerge as a central political force and remained hostile to the pursuit of a monarch-centered system.

### Stabilization of the Ruling System and Systematic Revamping

However, the fact that the crowning of the new king was due to the recommendation of the Hwabaek had troublesome implications for King Jinpyeong. Although King Jinheung's system did not founder all at once, its foundations had worn out and exposed uncomfortable weaknesses. In addition, King Jinpyeong's youth at the time of his enthronement emboldened the aristocrats. As such, solving the problem of how to reinvoke the weakened ruling system was King Jinpyeong's main priority.

King Jinpyeong appointed Noribu to the office of Sangdaedeung left empty by Geochilbu's resignation. There are some schools of thought that see Noribu as identical to the individual named Naeryebuji who is mentioned in an inscription on the Jeokseong Monument or Ichan Sejong who staved off an attacking Baekje force in the second year of King Jinji's reign (577). Whether this is the case or not, although neither his political standpoint nor character are known, King Jinpyeong must have been assisted by him. Meanwhile, the king appointed Kim Hujik as defense minister in the second year of his reign (580). Noribu and Kim Hujik were the two pillars who buttressed the earlier period of King Jinpyeong's reign. The two seem to have assumed responsibility respectively for politics and the military. An interesting fact is that, while the name 'Noribu' is derived from the vernacular language, 'Hujik' has its origin in Chinese characters. Chinese characters were originally employed for the name of the king and Buddhist monks and were not yet in common usage for the names of a common aristocrat like Hujik. In this sense, Hujik could be a forward thinking individual who was ahead of his time.

The original Hujik was the progenitor of the Zhou dynasty, worshipped as a god of agriculture. Adoption of such an individual's name means Silla's Hujik's family was already influenced by Confucianism. For example, Hujik cited Confucian classics to taunt King Jinpyeong when the latter neglected political affairs for the sake of game hunting and did not alter his stance

in the face of death. That he was King Jijeung's great-grandson was also significant. Accordingly, it can be inferred that Hujik was closely related to King Jijeung and was in favor of a political system centered on the king, enthusiastically supporting King Jinpyeong. He was also associated with other individuals who had a vision of reconstructing Silla on the basis of Confucianism, Kim Chunchu and Kim Yusin of later days.

King Jinpyeong changed the era name to Geonbok in the sixth year of his reign (584). Why he did not change the era name immediately upon his enthronement is unknown, but there must have been some motive behind the change. It is possible that it was intended to mark the declaration of King Jinpyeong's direct rule upon his becoming an adult.

King Jinpyeong's reign featured the creation of many new governmental departments and civil official positions up until the thirteenth year of his reign (591), the first stage of governmental reform. The second stage occurred much later in the forty-fourth year of his reign (622).

Let us start with the first stage of governmental reform. Up to this point, the core focus had been on the foremost government offices, such as the military in the defense ministry, the Sajeong department responsible for auditing, and the Pumju department responsible for finance and intelligence, but the basic overall structure of the central government ministries was established during King Jinpyeong's reign. For example, starting with Wihwabu, the department responsible for civil official personnel, Jobu, the department responsible for tax collection, Seungbu, the department responsible for means of transportation such as carts and horses, and Yebu, responsible for ceremonial rites and education, were installed one after another.

In doing so, an organizational structure of six codes was more or less completed, though it took a while



Fig 7. First Sinseongbi Monument of Mt. Nam in Gyeongju

before all positions in all the departments were filled.

Of the four government departments created in the early period of King Jinpyeong's reign, all except for the personnel department were dual-headed by two ministers, *yeong* and *sa*. The personnel department was only staffed by two officers for actual work, *daesa* and *sa*, but in the sense that the personnel department was run by two equal officers, it had the same management format. It was the defense department that had set the precedent for dual-headed management, consisting of two ministers, *yeong* and *sa*, up until this point. However, by the time the other departments had emulated the defense department in adopting dual-headed management, the latter had evolved into an official system of three ranks by installing the position of *jegam* between *yeong* and *sa*. This demonstrates that the defense department set the standard for Silla's government organizations and reflects the leadership and importance of the military in those days.

As described above, each government department featured an official system of two ranks up to King Jinheung's period. After Queen Jindeok's reign, however, the official rank system evolved into one of five ranks under the strong influence of Tang China during King Sinmun's unification period. Anyhow, governmental organs were largely in two categories: departments and ministries. Both of them were categorized according to their relative political weight and importance. Precedents for such a categorization had been set in King Jinpyeong's reign. It is just that the difference between the two categories is hard to define. Reform of government in the early period of King Jinpyeong's reign was finalized with the appointment of two diplomats termed *yeonggaek* buryeong in the thirteenth year of his reign (591).

The fact that the construction of Namsansinseong (Namsan New Fortress) was completed around the time of the above mentioned governmental reform appears significant. To date, ten monuments erected in relation to the construction of Namsansinseong have been discovered. We read from these monuments that Namsansinseong was a monumental work of civil engineering that demanded the mobilization of the population not only in the kingdom's capital but also from across the entire territory of Silla. Although mobilization of Silla's population for crucial public works (like Myeonghwal Fortress) was not unheard of, they pale in comparison with Namsansinseong in terms of size and range. One explanation is that the territorial extent of Namsansinseong was far greater than that of

its predecessors. On top of that, the fact that the monument was named Namsansinseong is interesting. All inscriptions start with a sworn statement to the country that, if the monument crumbles within three years of its completion, its builders would assume responsibility for the faulty construction. Not only is this statement a pledge of allegiance by the people of Silla to their country, it also hints at the reform of government shortly prior to the erection of those monuments.

It was not until the forty-fourth year of King Jinpyeong's reign (622) that another move for governmental reform was made, the first since the reform in the thirteenth year of his reign: three *gung*, Daegung, Yanggung, and Saryanggung, were integrated so that they came under the Naeseong department and were directed by a single minister, called a *sasin*. It was not only the start of an across-the-board reform of royal administration, but also a harbinger of the ensuing second round of governmental reform. Two daegam posts, were installed in the defense department the subsequent year, the forty-fifth year of King Jinpyeong's reign (623). The reform of the defense department again spearheaded the reform of government this time around: an official system composed of four ranks, *yeong*, *daegam*, *jegam*, and *sa*, was first applied to the defense department. This was the forerunner for the comprehensive installation of an official four-rank system across the entire government in Queen Jindeok's reign, which was achieved at one stroke. To recap the earlier point, the defense department spearheaded the reform of government because the historical situation in that era demanded that the military be prioritized. In the forty-sixth year of King Jinpyeong's reign (624), the Siwi department, responsible for guarding the king, was created for the first time and six *daegam* posts were created. Siwi was another example, in addition to the earlier mentioned Naeseong department responsible for the entire palace administration, which was designed to strengthen the king's authority.

In essence, the period of King Jinpyeong's reign can be said to mark an epoch in the evolution of Silla's governmental organization. Reform of government in the later part of King Jinpyeong's reign is noticeably different from that of the earlier part. As presaged by the creation of the Naeseong, the integrated department responsible for overall palace administration, government reform at this time, as opposed to earlier reforms, was chiefly aimed at invigorating the king's practical authority. Of course, an increasingly strained relationship between the three Korean kingdoms was another backdrop to this series of efforts to strengthen the Silla king's authority.

## Testing the New Diplomacy

King Jinpyeong reconstructed the fortresses *Myeonghwal sanseong* and *Seohyeungsanseong* in 592, the year following the construction of Namsansinseong. Although unclear, these reconstruction projects also appear to have required the mobilization of the provincial population from the entire country. Aside from this, Busanseong, a key fortress defending the northwestern frontier of the kingdom's capital, was also built around this time. With its completion the defense scheme protecting the kingdom's capital was more or less perfected. This action was taken because Silla had a good understanding of the capricious East Asian international situation. A monk named Wongwang travelled to the Chen dynasty of the Southern Dynasties in the eleventh year of King Jinpyeong's reign (589) to study Buddhism, at approximately the same time as the Sui dynasty, which had just united the Northern Dynasties, was closing in on Chen. When he returned, this news caused a serious increase in military tensions in the sphere of the three Korean kingdoms. His understanding of the precarious international situation motivated King Jinpyeong to buttress the defense system for the kingdom's capital.

Sui ended the era of division between the Northern and Southern Dynasties by annihilating Chen in 589. The emergence of one united dynasty in China that had been divided for centuries sent powerful shock waves through the three Korean kingdoms. It was time for them to renew their relationships. Emperor Wen, the founder of the Sui dynasty, took steps to invest kings for all three kingdoms. There was great energy in the air to re-coordinate the interrelationship among the three kingdoms with regard to the new order.

Baekje launched the first offensive against Silla under ominous circumstances, anxious to revenge its loss of the Han River basin and its painful fiasco during the Gwansanseong campaign. King Wideok, accountable for the fiasco, managed to restore normality to some degree over the course of his lengthy reign. When King Mu ascended to Baekje's throne following the reigns of King Hye and King Beop, Baekje had stepped up its offensive against Silla. Baekje took the shortest path from Sabiseong to the Silla's border via the Sobaek Mountains and attacked the transport hub of Amakseong. Ever since, Silla and Baekje had fought tooth and nail for every inch of this area. Instead of an all-out campaign, Baekje gradually eroded Silla's territory

through a war of attrition. Moreover, Goguryeo launched an offensive against Silla in the Han River basin from the year 603 onward. The frontline was drawn as sporadic battles broke out at key spots across border areas. As Silla was usually the target in these disputes, these skirmishes were about to escalate into a full-scale war between the three Korean kingdoms.

Cornered by simultaneous attacks from its two neighbors, Silla quickly approached the Sui dynasty, its only option while under siege. Almost every year, Silla had dispatched either official envoys or monks to Sui to observe Sui's domestic moves and international political situation. Alarmed by Goguryeo's offensives, King Jinpyeong had a diplomatic document asking for military aid drafted by the Buddhist monk Wongwang to urge Sui to attack Goguryeo in the thirtieth year of his reign (608). This was the moment when formal diplomacy with China commenced. Goguryeo's attack on Silla continued despite this diplomatic gambit, but it provided momentum for Silla's proactive diplomacy to secure its future survival.

Diplomacy with Sui was underscored by the installation of an office for diplomacy. The unprecedented installation of an office dedicated solely to diplomacy suggests its increased importance. The significance of diplomacy grew so much as to tie Silla's fate to the success of its diplomacy. As a united Chinese empire, Sui, emerged and positioned itself to impose a new order in East Asia at about the same time as tension among the three Korean kingdoms was reaching new heights, the importance of diplomacy also increased enormously. East Asia now entered an era of interlocked networks of diplomacy.

Records about the installation of the diplomacy office are somewhat fragmented. In the Silla bongi in the *Samguk sagi* it is recorded that King Jinpyeong first created the "Yeonggaekbu" to be in exclusive charge of diplomacy. As the name Yeonggaekbu literally means 'a department for welcoming guests,' it must have been a department in charge of dealing with diplomatic envoys. Its subsequent change of name to "Sabinbu," which has a similar meaning, confirms the function of this office. Of course, the responsibilities of this office cannot have been literally restricted to dealing with international guests; it was given this name because treatment of international guests was its main function and also a part of diplomacy. As such, the Yeonggaekbu should be understood as a government office in overall charge of diplomacy, including, above all, the treatment of diplomatic envoys.

However, Jikgwanji in the same source provides a different account of the creation of the Yeonggaekbu. According to this account, in the forty-third year of his reign (621) King Jinpyeong converted an office called "Waejeon" into "Yeonggaekjeon", which was then upgraded to Yeonggaekbu. However, Waejeon, which existed up to the year 621, and the Yeonggaekbu created in the year 591 are hard to clearly distinguish from each other in terms of their interrelationship. Because there are cases in "Jikgwanji" in the *Samguk sagi* in which later accomplishments are attributed to earlier periods, it is tempting to see the installation of Yeonggaekjeon as the installation of Waejeon. However, given that Silla had just launched diplomatic relations with the Sui dynasty in 591, the installation of the Yeonggaekbu as an independent diplomatic government office cannot be ignored. It is possible that it was set up exclusively for diplomacy with the Sui dynasty.

Without definitive information, we should try to combine records from both sources in order to clarify the issue. The Yeonggaekbu was created with two high-ranking officials in charge of the treatment of important international guests after a period where such guests had not been dealt with by a designated government office. On the other hand, the Waejeon existed to deal with guests from Wae at the time. The timing of its creation is hard to pin down, but it could have been after Gaya had been brought down by Silla. It seems that Waejeon was removed in 621, and Yeonggaekjeon was created to deal with important international guests.

As suggested above, at one stage different windows of diplomacy had been open for each different country, and then all of these windows were integrated into Yeonggaekjeon in 621. The closing down of Waejeon signifies that the direction of diplomacy had turned from Japan towards China: the beginning of silent diplomatic warfare of Silla originated from that point. In this sense, the creation of Yeonggaekjeon deserves particular attention as a monumental event in the history of Silla's diplomacy.

The timing of the creation of Yeonggaekjeon is also significant because it was the year that Silla sent its first emissaries to Tang that had just taken over a united China from the Sui dynasty. Emperor Gaozu of Tang reacted to the Silla's emissaries by sending an emissary bearing a message with a royal seal, a painted folding screen, and 300 sheets of silk to Silla. Yeonggaekjeon was set up amid these eventful circumstances. In other words, its creation revealed Silla's desire to dedicate itself to a diplomatic

offensive with Tang on its side. During the era when the Chinese Northern and Southern Dynasties were divided, Silla had turned its attention to diplomacy with Wae. But once a united China emerged, Silla quickly turned its diplomatic attention away from Wae and towards China. Waejeon was reinstalled at about the time of Silla's unification of the Three Kingdoms; however, it was no longer an office in the central government, but a part of the Naeseong department in charge of overall administrative work for the palace. This suggests that Silla could have been tied to Wae at the level of the royal families.

However, Silla did not stage a diplomatic offensive at that time just for the sake of coping with the precarious international situation. It was made possible by the mature establishment of its internal foundations. Silla had witnessed marked progress in the understanding of Chinese characters by diligently importing Buddhist scriptures, through its official approval of Buddhism, and by sending Buddhist monks abroad for study. Silla was ready to stage a diplomatic offensive. It was just that as the case of the monk Wongwang demonstrates, diplomacy was practiced at the level of the Buddhist monks and had not been refined to the extent of having diplomatic experts exclusively for diplomacy. However, the time for diplomatic experts was certainly nearing with the rapidly increasing importance of diplomacy. Such an expert-led diplomacy was initiated by the creation of Yeonggaekjeon. This is why it is no overstatement to define this point in time as a milestone in Silla's diplomacy.

### Consciousness for Seokgajok (Buddha's Bloodline) and Restructuring the Royal Family

Silla's Buddhism, officially approved in King Beopheung's reign, grew strong and richer throughout the reign of King Jinheung. In particular, Buddhism was deepening its roots as the national religion as its stronghold, Hwangnyongsa Temple, played a role as a crucial broker between religion and politics. The chief monk for Hwangnyongsa Temple oversaw all Buddhist affairs as the head of Silla's Buddhism and the king's counselor. As such, Buddhism in Silla operated inseparably side-by-side with politics. As King Jinheung saw himself as a Chakravartin, Buddhism and politics were even more closely linked. Because Silla staged many wars of conquest in the

name of Buddhism, the conquest was justified not only for the acquisition of material and human resources, but also for the pursuit and propagation of Buddhism. For example, King Jinheung toured newly annexed regions in the company of Buddhist monks. By doing so, the recently approved Buddhism in Silla spread quickly throughout the expanded territory.

Silla industriously projected its image as a Buddhist country. Hwangnyongsa Temple, once it was finished in 566, soon resumed activities again with the sculpting of a huge central Buddha statue, Jujonbul. An account of how the materials for the statue were imported from abroad, its magnitude implicit in the term "Jangnyuksang" (sixteen-foot Buddha statue), and the materials and the demanding sculpting techniques, all show how hard it was to complete the task of building this statue. A central Buddha statue in the league of the scale of Hwangnyongsa Temple was a tall order. Therefore, only after numerous trials and errors, was the statue successfully molded two years prior to King Jinheung's death in 574. As indicated by a legend that the huge central Buddha statue shed a tear one year prior to King Jinheung's death, as if it had foreseen his death, the statue was supposed to symbolize King Jinheung who also saw himself as a Chakravartin. In this way, a foothold for coupling politics with Buddhism was established.

King Jinpyeong tried to make the most of Buddhism by inheriting King Jinheung's Buddhist-orientated policies unchanged and paying even more attention to Buddhism than his predecessor. First, he built a conspicuous temple, called Naejeseokgung. Jeseok, the Korean term for the deity Indra, is the highest celestial god in Buddhism who commands everything in the heavens and on earth from his residence in heaven. This is why this temple was referred to not as a temple, but a palace (*gung*). "Nae" in the temple's name means "inner." Because the temple was built in the palace like Naebul Hall, its name contains the prefix *nae*, meaning "inner." However, as King Jinpyeong traveled to the temple by carriage, the location of this temple was probably not located within the premises of the palace. Nevertheless, as Naejeseokgung was built directly under palace control, despite the proximity of Hwangnyongsa Temple, this suggests its indispensable association with the re-invigoration of the royal family. The so called Seok Family ritual is also a case in point.

The senior monk Jajang who studied abroad in Tang for six years from 638 to 643 was said to have met Manjusri the Bodhisattva of wisdom on

Mt. Wutai in China. The Bodhisattva addressed Jajang: "Your king embodies Chalijongwang of Cheonchuk. Because he is already blessed by Buddha, he has a different fate that separates him from the others in Silla." Because the term 'Chali' here refers to Kshatriya, an Indian aristocrat caste, Silla's kings originated from an exceptional lineage rooted in India. In turn, this meant that the lineage of the kings of Silla was unique. This mentality of Silla was known as far away as China.

Although this was shaped by a Buddhist fable, it means that a legend fanning the belief that the Silla's king's lineage was exceptional was already in place in the Silla royal family. King Jinpyeong's first name was Baekjeong and his wife's name was Maya or Lady Maya. These are the names of Buddha's parents. King Jinpyeong's two junior brothers were named Baekban and Gukban, which are the names of Baekjeong's younger brothers and Buddha's uncles. In this way, all the family members of King Jinpyeong copied names from Buddha's family members. This is the reason that the Silla royal family was seen as part of the Kshatriya line. Furthermore, King Jinpyeong's direct family was considered not only as being of the Kshatriya caste but also as an incarnation of Buddha's family. This was just another deliberate attempt to consecrate the Silla royal family and differentiate it from all others. It is unclear from when such a belief had been in existence, but the consecration of the entire royal family seems to have been just one more step forward from King Jinheung's self-claimed Chakravartin status. Of course, the belief in a sacred family was aimed at significantly raising the Silla royal family's authority. The fact that the reform and the consecration of the royal family were carried out side-by-side is also worth noting.

King Jinheung positioned one *sasin* each in the Daegung, Yanggung, and Saryanggung in the seventh year of King Jinpyeong's reign in 585. Daegung seems to have referred to the king's residential space and Yanggung and Saryanggung seem to have referred to secondary palaces located in the original locations for the Yang and Saryang departments. Given that each department once had its own independent function, Yanggung and Saryanggung were probably department heads' residential spaces. After the department system had collapsed, these buildings came under the royal family's direct control and *sasin* were appointed to manage them systematically. Since King Jijeung from the Saryang department had become king, Silla's throne had been continuously succeeded to by Jijeung's direct lineage in the mid-period; therefore, the previously mentioned two

departments actually refer to only one department, Saryang. Accordingly, the king managed Yanggung and Saryanggung from his residence at Daegung. It means that vestiges of the department system still lingered, even though the king's authority had been transformed during King Beopheung's reign.

Incidentally, King Munmu rewarded Kim Yusin and Kim Inmun with treasure, land, and servants stored in *Bonpigung* (本彼宮) office for their accomplishments in the final war with Baekje in the second year (661) after the fall of Baekje. Each *gung* must have stored various forms of property. This also means that the *sasin* in charge of managing the properties must have managed not only the *gung* itself, but also the property in it. This was an attempt to separate the finance and administration of the state and that of the royal family from each other in order to manage the royal family's property systematically. It was one more step toward a king-centered aristocratic country.

In fact, even as the department system was disbanded and the king's authority established, basic work for tasks such as the separation of state and royal family property from each other remained undone. Therefore, a *sasin* was positioned in each of the three *gung* in the seventh year of King Jinpyeong's reign, and the foundations were laid to undertake the work that had previously been neglected. It was about this time that a significant number of central government departments were created or reformed. As they were being revamped, the royal family administration that had not been separate previously was to be managed apart from the rest. It was the first step towards a dual system for the central administration and the royal family, but the three *gung* were installed apart from the rest because the previous system had not yet been completely dismantled.

The three *gung* were integrated, and the Naeseong was finally installed to manage the integrated *gung* in the forty-fourth year of King Jinpyeong's reign in 622. The *sasin* in charge of each *gung* and the new *sasin* in charge of the integrated *gung* naturally had a different status. Although the range of the *sasin* official ranks was similar to that of the core government ranks, the authority of one integrated *sasin* became far more intensified than when there had been three for the position. Through this measure and others a management organization was systematically created from the *sasin* down. This means that the administrative work for the royal family was run completely separately from the central government administration. This separation between the state and the royal family was made possible by the significant elevation of the royal family's status. After all, the administration

of the sacred royal family could not be dealt with together with the administration of the common people. In the same vein, the concept of royal family and the range of the royal clan changed. A clear case in point is that the sacred bone lineage appeared in the *golpum* classification system.

### Establishment of the "Seonggol (Sacred Bone)" Lineage and Succession to the Throne

King Jinpyeong's objective in copying the names of members of the Buddha's family for his direct family members was not only to raise the status of the royal family and clan, but also to pave the way for a successor for his throne. From his standpoint, his future son had to also be Buddha, thus justifying his succession. The final stroke to perfect his sacred family was the bulwark of belief that the King is Buddha. If his son was believed to be Buddha's incarnation ascended to the throne, Silla could surpass India as a substantialized Buddhist land on earth.

However, despite all efforts, the much-expected son did not arrive for King Jinpyeong: the Silla Buddha was not born. This absence of a male heir foreshadowed future problems regarding the succession. King Jinpyeong had three daughters, but no son. The first child was Deongman, who would later succeed King Jinpyeong as Queen Seondeok. She had already been married once, although her husband was only suspected to be someone called Baekman. King Jinpyeong's second child was Cheonmyeong who would marry Yongchun, the deposed son of King Jinji, and gave birth to Kim Chunchu, who would become King Muyeol. His third child was Seonhwa who features as the main character in the story Seodongyo that contains the story of her marriage to Baekje's King Mu and the founding of Maitreya Temple.

Although King Jinpyeong's unswerving efforts promoted the royal family's status and authority, the problem was that his legitimate successor was yet to be secured for the lack of a male child. None amongst King Beopheung, King Jinheung, or King Jinji had belonged to their predecessors' direct lineage. As a result, the succession to the throne had not gone smoothly since the mid-period, causing repeated tragedy. King Jinpyeong was afraid that if he failed to secure a legitimate successor, all of his achievements in the area of a practical ruling system would be fruitless. His carefully devised plan to bequeath his throne to an incarnation of Buddha

was also hung in the balance.

It was out of this desperation that King Jinpyeong devised the concept of "sacred bone." The reason for and background of his rather arrogant consecration of his own direct family were already justifiable in the eyes of King Jinpyeong. All but one daughter, who was married to Baekje's King Mu for diplomatic purposes, had married incestuously. Crown Prince Dongnyun was also married to his father's younger sister, Lady Manho, who was therefore also his aunt. King Jinpyeong's own father-in-law was Bokseung *Galmunwang*, whose name is not corroborated on the Changnyeong Monument and may have been King Jinheung's younger brother, although this blood tie is not confirmed.

Since King Jijeung had ushered in the mid-period, there had been two trends in royal marital relationships. One was based on his marriage with Lady Bak. King Jijeung's wife had the Bak family name, as did the wives of Kings Beopheung and Jinheung. The other was an incestuous marriage. Ipong, King Jijeung's son and *galmunwang* of the Satak province, was married to King Beopheung's daughter and his own niece, Jiso. This incestuous trend continued all the way down to the crown prince, Dongnyun, whose own direct lineages continued such incestuous marriages, almost without exception. As the two types of marriage continued through the generations, incestuous marriage became the dominant form. Such incestuous marriages could have played a role as both the cause and background of King Jinpyeong's consecration of his family members, or it could be that King Jinpyeong promoted incestuous marriage as an instrument to perpetuate the sacred status of his family.

Incestuous marriage resulted in a narrowing of the extent of the royal family and royal clan. The lineages for King Namul and King Jijeung, whose generations had witnessed the establishment of the Kim clan's exclusive rights to the throne, had an extensive royal family and royal clan. However, as a result of the practice of excessive numbers of incestuous marriages from the king down, the royal clan was destined to diminish considerably. The range of the Kim clan shrank even further through incestuous marriages, starting originally with the Kim clans from the Takbu and Satakbu. The fact that the state and royal family finances were divided clearly backs up this phenomenon. Moreover, the narrowing of the royal family meant that successors for the throne were restricted to special groups. Belief in a sacred family helped to insure the rarity of such privileged groups.

King Jinpyeong molded the holy status of his royal family as if it were granted by heaven. An angel descended from heaven and conferred a belt made of jade upon King Jinpyeong according to the command of the Great Jade Emperor, and the latter kneeled and received it on his own. From that time, the belt had always been worn by the king for the Gyosa (a large rite held outside the kingdom's capital) or *Daesa* (another great rite) for the royal ancestors. This belt, called *cheonsa okdae* (celestial jade belt), was one of Silla's three treasures and was utilized to symbolize that the king's authority was justly vested in him by heaven.

It was difficult for this new belief to exist alongside the preexisting rituals for the *golpum* system. Although the core in the *gol* echelon in the midst of the ruling groups addressed as *gan* was referred to as a *gol*, the sacred family members privileged to wear the angel's jade belt further distinguished them from the rest of the Silla aristocracy. This required a reclassification of the *gol* clan, namely, the birth of the concept of sacred bone (*seonggol*). Although it is not clear whether the *gol* clan's collective title was true bone (*jingol*) from the beginning, the emergence of sacred bone prompted the dualization of the *golpum* system. While "true bone" refers to a vague and wide range of members of the royal clan, sacred bone refers to a narrowed down sacred royal clan born out of a specific political purpose in the late mid-period. Even the legitimate right to succeed to the crown was limited to the latter. It also originated from another background, whereby Silla installed a Naeseong with exclusive responsibility for the administration of the royal family's administration, completely separate from the central government. The Naeseong's administration was also confined to those of sacred bone lineage.

As such, sacred bone branched off from the preexisting *gol* clan according to King Jinpyeong's concept of a sacred family as the new leader of the *gol* clan. Reform of the overall *golpum* system was carried out in the course of conceptualizing sacred bone. The structure of *golpum* now comprised eight ranks due to the emergence of the sacred *golpum*, and the classification of *dupum* (head rank) proceeded in parallel with that for the *golpum* system. Because many new government departments and civil officials' posts were created as a result of further classification across *golpum* and *dupum*, relations between the *golpum/dupum* systems and status/official rank systems had to be reset for the sake of orderly management. In the course of reestablishing such relationships, the operation of the *golpum* system became even more stringent. This in turn resulted in a process of revamping the public official system as

well. This is the reason that King Jinpyeong's reign is of particular interest in the history of the Silla's civil official system.

The *golpum* system underwent a process of reestablishment in parallel with the revamping of the administrative government departments under King Jinpyeong. The first stage of reform work for the *golpum* system seems to have ended by the time sacred bone came into existence. For example, Seol Gyedu, a descendant of a noble family line and thought to have been a head-rank six (*yukdupum*) official, railed against his fate because his career would be blocked and limited by the barrier of the *golpum* system. Only those who belonged to the top *golpum* might advance in their careers in Silla. He subsequently left Silla for China in 621. Seol Gaedu had complained about the *golpum* system precisely because an even more discriminatory reform of the *golpum* system was under way. As a result, status for those of head-rank six was lowered one notch further.

What boosted the reform of the *golpum* system was the revamping of the civil official system and the birth of sacred bone. If the revamping of *dupum* was related to the civil official system, the revamping of the *golpum* system was directly linked to the emergence of sacred bone, a byproduct of King Jinpyeong's succession plan. The *golpum* system, coupled with the civil official system, was run that much more strictly. Because King Jinpyeong failed to fulfill his wish for a male heir to his throne, he created a new *golpum* called sacred bone in the name of the consecrated royal family. It was intended to insure that the crown was handed down within his own sacred family, but as his sacred bone gambit was ill-received, a problem arose.

## 4

## Pursuit of a New Ruling System

### Queen Seondeok's Enthronement and Kim Chunchu and Kim Yusin

King Jinpyeong had wished that his own son would succeed to his throne, so that the mistakes of the past would not be repeated. By doing so, he hoped his legacy could be assured. However, because he was not blessed with the birth of a male child, King Jinpyeong resorted to the sacred bone idea, by which his daughter could succeed to his throne. He nominated his widowed first daughter, Deongman, as would-be queen. Even if his own brothers, who had already died by that time, were alive, he wanted to try to hand down his crown to someone in his direct lineage.

In this way, King Jinpyeong worked step-by-step to bequeath his throne to Deongman. He dared to make such an attempt, not only because the king-centered power system had been strengthened through the revamping of the civil official system, but also because his long period on the throne had consolidated his authority. In short, the ruling system established under his reign had become firmly rooted.

However, as King Jinpyeong was dying of old age, dissent began to surface. Immediately before the king's demise, Chilsuk and *Achan* Seokpum committed treason in 631. Their plot was uncovered prior to its being carried out, and the mastermind, Chilsuk, was executed at the Eastern

Market in Gyeongju and nine generations of his direct family were also executed, a draconian punishment. Seokpum, who had fled to Baekje, came back for his family, only to be captured and killed. Such a draconian punishment was applied not only because the culprits were opposed to King Jinpyeong's succession plan, but also because the king wanted to set an example to deter future opposition.

Although Chilsuk's conspiracy failed, it shows that there were various disputes over Deongman's succession. In fact, a woman's succeeding to the throne had been unprecedented until then. It is no wonder then that, notwithstanding the astute preventive measures in place, the succession of a female rather than a male opened the floodgates of controversy.

In the end, however, King Jinpyeong's wish was realized posthumously: Deongman was crowned as Queen Seondeok in 632. Inevitably, and unsurprisingly, the process of enthroning the first queen went through many twists and turns. How it proceeded can be summed up as follows. First, it is highly possible that expected problems were preempted through strict control and management. The quelling of Chilsuk's plot provided motivation. King Jinpyeong's patient reformation of the ruling system was also firmly established. Second, the aforementioned sacred family and its sacred bone rituals appealed to the then-ruling class as a justifiable cause for enthroning a queen. Sacred bone rituals were likely to be useful, not only for the queen's enthronement, but also for silencing the voice of dissidents. Third, Queen Seondeok's arch-supporters like Kim Chunchu and Kim Yusin were in influential positions to throw effective weight behind the queen. In the face of these two powerful henchmen, even growing opposition could be kept at bay to some degree.

However, the royal succession was ultimately resolved by negotiation through which the anti-queen opposition ended up accepting the pro-queen supporters' counter-offers. The queen's ascent to the throne was a one-time only transitional outcome. Besides, aged and infirm, Queen Seondeok was hastily organizing the selection of her own successor. Under these circumstances, the Sangdaedeung seemed the most likely nominee to succeed Queen Seondeok. Accordingly, a critical bargain over the position of Sangdaedeung took place.

Ich'an Sueulbu succeeded Sangdaedeung Noribu in 588 (10th year of King Jinpyeong's reign). Sueulbu is either the person named Suhilbu appointed to be an emissary for Yanggung among the three *gung* in the seventh year of

King Jinpyeong's reign, given the similarity of their names, or was related to him. This means that the king's confidante was appointed as Sangdaedeung and, since then, a Sangdaedeung had not been appointed for a very long time. King Jinpyeong was likely to have kept the position unoccupied after Sueulbu's resignation. Eulje was eventually designated as the next Sangdaedeung to supervise overall national policies in the year of Queen Seondeok's enthronement. Given that, since Eulje, Sangdaedeung had begun being continually appointed again, Eulje must have set a precedent. That the long-empty Sangdaedeung position was again filled in the year of Queen Seondeok's enthronement is extraordinary. In other words, the resurrection of the post of Sangdaedeung was to reward those who were dissenting over the issue of a female head of the nation in return for their eventual acquiescence. Queen Seondeok's ascent to the throne was the outcome of a compromise between the rival pro-queen and anti-queen factions.

The two opposing groups agreed to compromise because aggravating the dispute further could have imploded, provoking internal revolt and jeopardizing Silla's future. On top of that, not only were Baekje and Goguryeo bearing down on Silla, but China, newly united by Tang had increased tensions sharply in East Asia by conquering its surrounding regions one by one. Internal division in such a critical situation might escalate into a far riskier situation. This is the circumstantial reason that forced the two opposing sides to compromise, albeit temporarily.

Of course, the fiercest opponents of a queen's coming to power were the traditional aristocrats. Neither were they in favor of a monarch-centered power concentration system. They were in favor of a conference system and the continuation of a department system by which their opinions were vindicated. The Sangdaedeung, a middle ground between them and their counterparts, was agreed to for this very reason. They wanted to voice their opinions through the Sangdaedeung as their arbitrator, while dealing with the king or queen. In doing so, the Sangdaedeung's character altered, and he came to represent the aristocrats' opinions at this time.

The group supporting the queen differed from the traditional aristocrats in terms of their political standpoint. They worked for the proactive invigoration of the monopolistic ruling system centering around their royal ruler. Their ranks comprised political groups with a radically new ideology and orientation, as well as some conventional aristocrats. In other words, those in favor of the queen's ascent to the throne consisted of an assortment of political forces,

among whom Kim Chunchu and Kim Yusin were most prominent.

Kim Chunchu was a grandson of King Jinji who had been dethroned by the people of Silla. Kim Chunchu's father, Yongchun, could have succeeded to the throne but for his father's disgrace and his questionable birth. As the cause of King Jinji's dethronement and the source of the story about Lady Dohwa, Yongchun had been born out of wedlock, in violation of the traditional marriage customs at that time. He is likely to have been an illegitimate child of Lady Dohwa. Nonetheless, he must have been raised as a true bone aristocrat in the palace under King Jinpyeong's protection. He climbed the career ladder so far as to be appointed as a naesa emissary. However, because he was not eligible to be officially appointed in his own right, he was always passed over by traditional aristocrats. His vulnerable status did not improve much even after his marriage to King Jinpyeong's second daughter. Unfortunately, Yongchun's vulnerable status was a heritage Kim Chunchu could not overcome.

Kim Yusin's great-grandfather was Geumgwan Gaya's last king, King Guhyeong. His status as a descendant of the Geumgwan Gaya royal family was outlandish to the traditional nobility of Silla. His father, Muryeok, was an acclaimed general who had made prominent contributions to King Jinheung's territorial expansion at the forefront of many battles. Nonetheless, the jealousy of the traditional nobility did not diminish. Stories about the marriage between Kim Yusin's father, Kim Seohyeon, and his mother, Kim Manmyeong, a daughter of Seok Heuljong, King Jinheung's junior brother, and marriage between Kim Chunchu and Kim Yusin's younger sister reflect this situation very well.

Crippled by the shortcomings of their birth, both Kim Yusin and Kim Chunchu were always undermined by Silla's traditional aristocrats and felt alienated. Their animosity towards traditional aristocrats and shared frustration about the invisible social barriers and contradictions in Silla was the reason that they bonded well and became interdependent. At similar ages, they both joined forces specifically to throw their weight behind Queen Seondeok's enthronement. Because the crowning of a queen was in itself an eventful incident contrary to Silla's conventions, the two Kims spotted a decisive opportunity to set a new course for Silla's future, hoping to realize their vision through Queen Seondeok's enthronement. Although their desire to make inroads into the center of power arose initially from a desire to overcome the bitter reality of their situations, deeper inside lay

a passion for revolutionizing Silla's society. A queen's ascent to the throne opened a window of opportunity for them, and her eventual enthronement paved the way to the realization of their vision.

### A Wavering Ruling System and Diplomacy with Tang China

Because Queen Seondeok had been crowned through striking a deal between two opposing sides, maintenance of the status quo was the best option. Maintaining checks and balances was the name of the game in a political dichotomy, and all Kim Yusin and Kim Chunchu could do was maintain the status quo without risking the fragile balance of power with further attempts to reform the political structure. This is also the reason that Queen Seondeok committed herself to the pious practice of Buddhism. However, during Queen Seondeok's reign everyone silently prepared for the future in the midst of a very volatile situation. The pro-queen and anti-queen parties were both saving their strength for a decisive opportunity. Queen Seondeok, torn between these warring parties, led a difficult life. This is why she committed herself to politically insignificant projects such as building temples like Bunhwangsa and Youngmyosa and observatories like Cheomseongdae.

Her stress-related illness went from bad to worse and deteriorated to the point of no return in the fifth year of her reign, 636. As such, she invited eminent monks to lecture on the *Benevolent King Sutra* (*Inwang gyeong*) at Hwangnyongsa Temple and created one hundred priests for the sake of her recuperation. The *Benevolent King Sutra* supports the patriotic defense of one's country so it is also called the *National Defense Sutra* (*Hoguk gyeong*), and this indicated an awareness that the queen's recuperation amounted to the defense of the country. Although easily thwarted in the end, an incident whereby a small-scale Baekje force had infiltrated surprisingly deeply as far as Okmungok in Silla territory deepened domestic anxiety. The same was true of Goguryeo's provocative encroachment in Chiljungseong not long after the Baekje incident.

Meanwhile, a large-scale Baekje force attacked about forty fortresses in the region to the west of the Nakdong River in the eleventh year of Queen Seondeok's reign, 642. It was almost equivalent to an all-out war. Silla sent an urgent request for help to Tang, but to no avail. Shortly thereafter, an emboldened Baekje went so far as to attack a military hub, Daeyaseong,

west of the Nakdong River. Most of what had previously been Gaya territory in the Nakdong River basin fell into Baekje's possession. No sooner had Baekje's King Mu been crowned in 600 than he began to encroach on Silla territory town by town, starting from the foothills of Mt. Jiri. The advance of the front toward the vicinity of the kingdom's capital stoked anxiety in Silla, with all signs indicating that Silla and Baekje were on the brink of an all-out war. For King Uija of Baekje, who had led an internal palace coup to successfully deprive a military faction of its political power, there was an urgent need to quell internal insecurity at Silla's expense.

Baekje's conquest of Daeyaseong itself sent shock waves throughout Silla. To make matters worse, its dishonored general commander and governor was Kim Pumseok. He had been seriously undermining local morale by seducing local potentates' wives as well as the wives of his accompanying staff. On top of that, upon Baekje's overwhelming attack, he and his wife were on the verge of surrendering to Baekje to save their own lives despite the exhortations of the governor's local staff, including a man named Jukjuk, to defend to the end, only to be murdered later. His deplorable conduct as a commander could not have been in greater contradiction to the five secular injunctions (*sesok ogye*) of the Hwarang, and his disgraceful conduct, as well as his responsibility for the fall of Daeyaseong, attracted enormous criticism.

Kim Pumseok was the son-in-law of Kim Chunchu. The death of Kim Pumseok and his wife pushed Kim Chunchu into a corner politically, without giving them any chance for mourning. So Kim Chunchu decided to go to Goguryeo and ask them to help Silla stage a counter attack. At that time, Yeon Gaesomun had just taken control of Goguryeo. Yeon Gaesomun dethroned King Yeongnyu and throned King Bojang. As he did not have a friendly stance toward Silla, the chance was faint for Kim Chunchu to succeed in getting Goguryeo's assistance. So this must have been part of a political action to show his opponents. Yeon Gaesomun put Kim Chunchu into prison, but Kim Chunchu exploited the political turmoil in Goguryeo and managed to escape.

The failure to win support from Goguryeo subsequently led Silla to turn to Tang. They dispatched one emissary after another in 643 to urge Tang to help Silla out of its crisis. At the time, Silla appealed desperately to Tang that attacks by the allied forces of Goguryeo and Baekje would certainly hasten the day of Silla's destruction, highlighting the alliance between Baekje and

Goguryeo in order to swiftly encourage Tang towards favoring Silla. In response to such an appeal, Emperor Taizong gently pressurized Silla to choose from three options. First, a small-scale border legion together with Khitan and Mohe forces would attack the Liaodong Peninsula, temporarily driving the allied forces away from Silla. Second, thousands of red uniforms and flags would be provided to disguise Silla's soldiers as Tang soldiers, which would drive away the allied forces as they would be afraid of engaging the Tang army. Third, because Baekje looked down on Silla for having a female head of state, Tang would offer Silla one of its own royalty as a male substitute for the queen with hundreds of warships packed with soldiers. For Silla, none of the three options was palatable. The third option would have been the most helpful but for the unacceptable condition of enthroning a member of the Tang imperial family as Silla's king. Tang Emperor Taizong berated Silla's emissary and was said to have been at his wit's end over what he saw as the latter's pettiness and incompetence.

In fact, Tang had already established a plan aimed at Goguryeo and proceeded to launch an all-out war. After the conquest of Gochang in 640, the only worthy enemy left for Tang was Goguryeo. Tang was busy with thorough, preliminary preparations, for example, by collecting

comprehensive data and closely observing the current situation in order to effortlessly defeat Goguryeo. Tang's emperor, Taizong, was very familiar with how the preceding Sui dynasty had suffered three humiliating fiascos and fallen as a result of exhausting wars against Goguryeo, a folly he did not wish to repeat. In other words, Tang's offer to pick one of three unacceptable plans was merely an excuse to decline Silla's request gently. The only option truly present in the mind of the Tang emperor was the first option, which Tang actually implemented soon afterwards.

However, the statement from Emperor Taizong had a major impact on the Silla government. Tang singled out the fact of a queen reigning as one of the factors affecting their offer of military aid. This view was summed up later in the *Samguk sagi* in the words "a female head of state cannot rule well," a statement that struck a chord with the anti-queen factions in Silla, so much so as to encourage political attacks on the queen and to disturb Silla's political consensus. It was the equivalent of pouring fuel on an already smoldering fire of domestic discontent that had been exacerbated by Baekje's attacks. The undermining of the checks-and-balances system formed around Queen Seondeok's enthronement left the situation on a knife edge.

Fig 8. Daeyaseong Fortress in Hapcheon



## Construction of the Nine-story Wooden Pagoda of Hwangnyongsa Temple

Jajang, who had gone to Tang to study Buddhism, came back home in the third lunar month, 643, at approximately the same time as Silla dispatched an emissary to Tang requesting urgent military help against Baekje's attack. His return was as a result of a request from Queen Seondeok to Emperor Taizong. Queen Seondeok thought that Jajang could provide the answer to the current crisis. She trusted him so much that she had begged him to assume the vacant Daebo position with promises of both threats and rewards before he entered the Buddhist priesthood. At that time, she had gone so far as to threaten Jajang to either accept the position or be decapitated. Queen Seondeok, who was twisting and turning as she tried to strike a balance between cooperation and confrontation with the disputing factions at that time, thought that if Jajang could not find a course through the current political situation, no one could. But Jajang swore obstinately that he would rather die than give up practicing Buddhist ethics. Because he flatly rejected Queen Seondeok's offer of an official appointment, all she could do was grant his wish to enter the priesthood.

Jajang's father Murim was an aristocrat of true bone status and his family belonged to the most powerful lineage of those days. Because Murim had had no male offspring to inherit his family line, he had promised Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, that if he had a son, he would offer him as a Buddhist monk. Jajang reached his decision to enter the priesthood after he had worked as a government official, married, and had a child. It was perhaps the fact that Jajang's competence had been proven in office that had convinced Queen Seondeok to try to appoint him as Daebo.

While in Tang for five years, Jajang was busy not only in carrying out his original purpose, the further study of Buddhism, but also, for example, in visiting Chang'an to be welcomed by Tang's Taizong. He was very familiar with information on and recent news about Tang's internal situation. Needless to say, he was updated about Silla's urgent request for Tang military intervention against Baekje's aggression and more. A story has been handed down orally that, as Jajang was nearing Taehwa Pool, a deity appeared and advised him: "Silla shall continue being invaded because its female head of state can instill no fear and lacks dignity. But the erection of a nine-storey wooden pagoda in Hwangnyongsa Temple will neutralize her bad influence

and neighboring countries will start surrendering one after another." This reflects the fact that Jajang had familiarized himself well with the complex multifaceted situation and had come back home with well-thought-out defensive measures for the situation. Besides, the very fact that Jajang had terminated his Buddhist studies in Tang to return in accordance with Queen Seondeok's request means his role as Queen Seondeok's unofficial confidant and advisor in the simmering crisis had already been waiting for him in Silla. Queen Seondeok must have had enormous faith in Jajang's ability.

Upon his return, Jajang proposed the construction of a nine-storey wooden pagoda in Hwangnyongsa Temple to Queen Seondeok. He justified this proposal by emphasizing the prophecy that the nine surrounding barbarian states would surrender to Silla as a result. Silla's first construction of a nine-storey wooden pagoda had previously been proposed by a monk, Anhong. Coming back home from his studies in China in 625, Anhong had made a similar case to Jajang's for the construction of a nine-storey pagoda. He seems to have made this proposal after witnessing many Buddhist public construction projects under Emperor Wen of Sui. However, his timing was wrong. Because Silla was not in a severe crisis at that time, Anhong's proposal was not taken seriously. Jajang must have had a good understanding of Anhong's failure well before he headed to China. As it was, Jajang, returned home afresh with a copious amount of intelligence and news. His proposal to erect a nine-storey pagoda at Hwangnyongsa Temple just in time to cope with the internal and external crises was readily accepted. However, Jajang invented a story about the positive effects of the pagoda construction as a deity's prophecy, lest his proposal should face predictable opposition. For Queen Seondeok, like a drowning person ready to grasp even at a straw, the proposal was something to cling to in a time of crisis. An additional factor was that not only was Queen Seondeok ready to listen to Jajang, but even her political enemies relied on Buddhism as the basis for their ruling ideology. Therefore, there was little resistance when Queen Seondeok accepted Jajang's proposal.

In fact, Jajang pursued the construction of the nine-storey pagoda with another political objective in mind. Given Silla's internal and external situation at the time, even the trusted Jajang's large-scale construction project could have been seen as over ambitious. The last thing Silla needed at that time was a large-scale public construction project to deplete its resources. It should instead have been using its resources to build up its military to fend

off the Baekje forces at its border. There was also no guarantee that the construction of the nine-storey pagoda would relax internal and external tensions soon simply because it was built in one of Silla's key national temples. Nevertheless, it was decided that the astronomically costly nine-storey wooden pagoda would be built. There must, therefore, have been some internal political purposes beneath the surface.

The most obviously eye-catching aspect of the project was that Silla requested Baekje to supply it with its top civil engineers and craftsmen, offering a substantial amount of treasure in exchange. Baekje's answer was to send the craftsman Abiji. Baekje must have had its own calculations in mind as it agreed to Silla's request amidst the ongoing barrage of its attacks. Baekje needed time to clean up the messy aftermath of the coup masterminded by King Uija and to reorganize territory taken in its recent foray into Silla. Under these difficult circumstances, Baekje received Silla's request for craftsman, probably interpreting the request as a sign that Silla would cease its hostile reactions, much like a ceasefire proposal. Baekje also welcomed the request as a sign that Silla was going to concentrate its national resources on peaceful civil engineering instead of armaments.

However, that was exactly what Silla was aiming at, namely, to temporarily calm the current escalating tense situation by making a request for a Baekje craftsman in order to wait and see how Baekje would react. If the plan were to bear fruit, Silla could escape the crisis situation for the time

being in order to pursue internal stabilization. In other words, the staggering cost of the construction of the nine-storey wooden pagoda was the price for this precious time that Silla so desperately needed. Fortunately for Silla, the two countries' interests overlapped simultaneously, paving the way to a tentative armistice through the dispatch of Abiji.

Speaking of the aforementioned internal stabilization, the statement "a female ruler cannot govern because of her inability to instill fear and her lack of dignity" had sent massive shock waves throughout Silla. Internal division was felt to be as serious a threat, if not more so, than external pressures, and Queen Seondeok's faction lost more ground. A side effect of an international diplomatic effort meant to neutralize an external crisis had caused the internal situation to deteriorate. There was an urgent need for an effective measure against a hostile consensus that was spreading like a forest fire, a consensus that the combination of external threats and severe internal divisions was a recipe for implosion. This ominous consensus twisted the arms of Queen Seondoek's opponents into acquiescing in the construction of the nine-storey wooden pagoda. In other words, the nine-storey wooden pagoda was meant above all to reduce the tensions of internal division rather than to stave off external pressures.

Yongchun, Kim Chunchu's father, was appointed general director of the construction project. Together with 200 officials he oversaw the construction of the nine-storey wooden pagoda that had been conceived by Jajang.

Fig 9. Engraved Gilt-bronze Plaques from the Hwangnyongsa Temple Site in Gyeongju



Because Yongchun, like Jajang, had taken Queen Seondeok's side, the erection of the nine-storey wooden pagoda was actually considered to be dominated by the pro-queen faction. However, Jajang, Yongchun and Yongchun's son did not share even a basic understanding of the existing Silla society or a vision for Silla's future. This disparity surfaced later when Kim Chunchu seized power. However, in summary, the construction of the nine-storey wooden pagoda was primarily intended to build a grand coalition, including even the anti-queen factions, in order to surmount Silla's crisis and eventually restore internal stability through consensus building.

The erection of the nine-storey wooden pagoda in Hwangnyongsa Temple was, therefore, ostensibly a Buddhist public work, but was also backed by strong political calculation. It was Queen Seondeok's winning card, played to overcome Silla's internal and external ordeals through Jajang's idea. This was an attempt to build a nine-storey wooden pagoda and also to again realize the amalgamation of politics and Buddhism. This is why even the anti-queen faction acquiesced in it. Of course, what each of them wanted to achieve through the construction was different, and these disparate goals were exposed when the various supporters of the project clashed head-on over Tang's massive invasion of Goguryeo and its results.

### Bidam's Revolt and a New Orientation

By the time the nine-story wooden pagoda at Hwangnyongsa Temple was about to be completed, a new situation had unfolded. Tang was about to initiate an all-out war against Goguryeo. Because Goguryeo remained the only worthy foe after the annihilation of Gochang, Tang stepped up its war preparations. Chen Da De (陳大德) was dispatched to Goguryeo to examine the topography and military positions from the kingdom's capital to the border areas. In the wake of his surveillance expedition, he submitted a report on Goguryeo, called *Gaoliji* to Tang's Emperor Taizong.

Tang dedicated itself to preliminary preparations for war against Goguryeo in order to avoid repeating the Sui dynasty's mistakes. Emperor Yang of Sui had launched three massive attacks on Goguryeo in vain before the dynasty had even stabilized its own new foundations, and it then collapsed under its own weight. Tang was likewise a young country, and the aftershocks from Taizong's coup in his ascent to the throne were still

being felt. Behind Taizong's hasty preparation for an attack on Goguryeo lay an ulterior motive of silencing various internal and external issues with a successful conquest.

Taizong dispatched Xiangli Xuan Jiang to Goguryeo in advance as part of his preparations to pave the way to a resounding victory. He sought to spy on Goguryeo's internal situation and find a justifiable cause for invasion. Prior to this, Xiangli Xuan Jiang had visited Baekje and Silla to relay Taizong's messages to urge them to join his expeditionary force for war against Goguryeo. The consequences could not have been more different. Not only did Baekje turn down Tang's request, but it also took advantage of the Goguryeo power vacuum to attack Silla. Nonetheless, Silla responded to Tang's request by sending a force of thirty or fifty thousand. The *Tang shu* (Book of Tang) probably records a force of fifty thousand because Silla's official notification to Tang provided that figure.

However, Silla's decision to respond positively to Tang's request was not made lightly. Enormous internal controversy about the dispatch broke out, and there was a clash between the anti-dispatch party, which was worried about the possibility of Baekje attacking and the pro-dispatch party, which was mainly concerned about trying to reduce Tang's steep demands. Their acrimony seems to have resulted in the reduction of the number of the forces dispatched from 50,000 to 30,000. Naturally, the other 20,000 soldiers were added to the home defense force, especially in view of Baekje's aggression. Baekje subsequently attacked and, unsurprisingly, captured seven fortresses as a result of the power vacuum on Silla's western border. To make matters worse, Taizong's hands-on invasion wound up as a fiasco. Enormous confusion reigned in Silla as responsibility was apportioned for the grave consequences. A distinctly ominous event related to this unpredictable situation was that Bidam was appointed Sangdaedeung in 645 by the time the Silla's force for Tang was almost ready to depart.

Although what happened to Bidam's predecessor, Supum, is unclear, Bidam was suddenly inaugurated as Sangdaedeung in 645. Especially in such critical circumstances, Bidam's appointment must have been related to the dispatch of Silla's force. There is no doubt that, especially given Bidam's behavior soon after his appointment, his inauguration as Sangdaedeung must have been a byproduct of the process of resolving the issue of dispatching military aid.

It was inevitable that the party in favor of military aid for Tang's failed

expedition would lose face. The exact damages that resulted from the dispatch of forces is not known, but Tang's fiasco and Silla's loss of seven fortresses to Baekje were a glaring reality and, as a result, the party that had supported military aid found itself cornered. The gambit of the pro-dispatch party was to offer the office of Sangdaedeung (currently either vacant or held by Supum) to a leading member of the anti-dispatch faction, Bidam. He was strongly allied to the anti-queen faction who had objected to participating in Tang's war against Goguryeo, as opposed to the pro-queen faction that had made diligent diplomatic efforts to befriend Tang, thus voicing their pro-dispatch opinions loudly and clearly. Although the immediately approaching storm was avoided by appointing Bidam to the position of Sangdaedeung, the inflammatory situation did not die down. Bidam's party agreed to such a patched-up offer because the Sangdaedeung would be in the most advantageous position to succeed to the throne. The perception that Queen Seondeok was nearing her final days was also a factor that encouraged Bidam's acceptance of the office of Sangdaedeung.

On the surface, the internal disputes seemed to die down for a short while, but continued violently beneath the surface. How to cope with Queen Seondeok's succession was the question. The opposition faction was firmly against the enthronement of another queen, and it constantly reminded the pro-queen party of Tang Taizong's logic that a female head of state cannot rule because of her inability to instill fear and lack of dignity. By contrast, the pro-queen party centering around Kim Chunchu, put forward another claim that there were no suitable male candidates among the *seonggol* lineage and nominated another woman, Seungman, Queen Seondeok's younger cousin. Neither the anti-queen party nor the pro-queen party yielded an inch of their respective ground nor did they try to find common ground. Under the circumstances of this stalemate, Kim Chunchu crossed the East Sea. Takamuko Kuromaro, a leading reformer of the new government under Taiga Gaishin, had visited Silla in September 646. Kim Chunchu offered to accompany the visitor from Wae on his return journey to reciprocate his visit to Silla. Although Kim Chunchu's departure to Wae must have been agreed upon by both rival parties, there was also a hidden reason.

Taking advantage of Kim Chunchu's absence, those who opposed another female ruler plotted against the queen and her supporters while the queen and her side was hoping to gain as much information as possible about how a female head of state had succeeded in Wae. Two queens had

ascended to the throne in Wae for the first time in East Asia: Empress Suiko in 593 and Empress Kogyoku in 642. The two queens' ascent to the throne was made possible in Wae because their predecessors had died without preparing legitimate male successors. In short, the queens were probably a compromise alternative to fill a power vacuum in which political wars could otherwise germinate, that is to say, a temporary measure in exceptional circumstances. The fact that Empress Kogyoku stepped down as soon as Taiga Gaishin succeeded to the throne in 645 is circumstantial evidence for this interpretation. Therefore, such information provided the pro-queen party with exceptionally convenient evidence. In summary, Kim Chunchu had departed for Wae with another purpose than to simply follow or fulfill diplomatic protocol.

In the absence of the pro-queen party's main figure, Kim Chunchu, Sangdaedeung Bidam persuaded Yeomjong and others to revolt for the purpose of crowning himself at Myeonghwal Fortress, which he and his fellow conspirators had chosen as their headquarters. They revolted, of course, under the logic that female rulers are incompetent. Their revolt targeted not only the incumbent female ruler, Queen Seondeok, but also her nominated female successor. Queen Seondeok was not assassinated but died almost as soon as the revolt broke out on the eighth day of the first lunar month. Her infirm and aged physical condition was unable to stand the shock of the revolt. Seungman was crowned as Queen Jindeok following Queen Seondeok's demise.

Bidam's revolt lasted about ten days until the 17th day of the first lunar month. The ruling aristocrats were divided in two, and the struggle spiraled into a maelstrom in and around the kingdom's capital. In the beginning, Bidam's force won the upper hand and besieged the royal guards' headquarters, Wolseong (月城). While the royal army was dangerously cornered, their acclaimed general Kim Yusin boosted their morale through his tactics and stratagems, and it was finally able to extract itself from the dire situation. As a result, by the seventeenth day of the first lunar month the tide of battle had reversed in favor of the royal army, and it was able to defeat Bidam's rebel force. The new Silla regime imposed a draconian punishment on everyone involved in Bidam's revolt by executing not only its thirty leaders but also their family members to the ninth generation by applying the rule of guilt-by-association. It wanted to set an unforgettable example, and it was a lurid overture for a new era.



Part 2

## The Unification of the Three Kingdoms by Silla and Subsequent Developments

The Unification of the Three Kingdoms and the System  
of Governance of the Middle Period

Inauguration of the Late Period and Subsequent Developments

The Fall of Silla

## Chapter 1

# The Unification of the Three Kingdoms and the System of Governance of the Middle Period

Kim Chunchu and the Royal Authority of the Middle Period  
Demise of Baekje and Goguryeo and Unification of the Three Kingdoms  
System of Governance and Principles of the Middle Period  
The Flowering of Non-Zen Buddhism and the Ripening of Culture  
The Decline of Monarchical Power

## 1

### Kim Chunchu and the Royal Authority of the Middle Period

#### Kim Chunchu a Subject of Conflicting Opinions and Assessments

*Samguk sagi* (History of the Three Kingdoms) records that the people of Silla divided their history into three periods, Early, Middle and Late, of which the Middle Period spanned the reign of King Taejong Muyeol (r. 654-661) to that of his last descendant, King Hyegong (r. 765-780). This suggests that the people of Silla recognized the rise of King Muyeol, otherwise known as Kim Chunchu, to power as the pivotal moment in the history of Silla. Our own contemporary historians also acknowledge the Middle Silla Period as the heyday of the Silla dynasty, and as a flourishing period characterized by political security and cultural prosperity.

The first half of the seventh century was characterized by turmoil and upheaval throughout the whole of East Asia. China had been divided into separate entities ever since the Five Barbarians and Sixteen Kingdoms periods. The Sui and Tang dynasties had eventually unified the various divided states while expanding their dominion over neighboring nations. The power balance between the East Asian nations established back in the fifth century began to come apart. Goguryeo devised strategies against the powerful forces of the Sui and Tang by reinforcing its control over the Khitan and Mohe peoples, and by recovering the regions around the

Han River then under the rule of Silla. Silla and Goguryeo plunged into a heated state of war unprecedented since the 590s. Baekje took advantage of Goguryeo's incursions into the northern borders of Silla and launched massive assaults against its western borders, marching east towards the Nakdong River running through the heart of the beleaguered dynasty. Kim Chunchu found himself at the middle of this intense crisis on the peninsula and determined to resolve the situation in favor of Silla. He embraced the Confucian ideology of the Royal Government and reformed the centralized system of government of Silla. He also forged a military alliance with Tang, tactically paving the way for the unification of the three kingdoms of Silla, Baekje and Goguryeo. Kim was not simply drawing on the power of Tang; he also envisaged Tang's developed systems and foreign strategies and used the whole package to benefit the development and security of Silla. He established new models in the political, economic, diplomatic and cultural domains which ultimately sustained Silla for more than 300 years.

Many critics have fiercely blamed Kim Chunchu for destroying Baekje and Goguryeo and for betraying kingdoms essentially of the same bloodline by inviting the foreign forces of Tang into the peninsula; and still today the prevailing opinion within academia of Kim's political deeds, in terms of both national and foreign affairs, is extremely negative. The criteria of nationalism in the modern sense, however, are not suitable for judging the decisions and deeds of a leader who was active some 1,500 years ago. Accusations to the effect that he was too dependent upon or reverent toward Tang may blind us to the ultimate aim and real benefits of Kim's pro-Tang policy.

### Chunchu and Bidam: The Names Say It All

Kim Chunchu became King Taejong Muyeol in 654, although he had already taken de facto control of Silla after subduing the revolt of the Sangdaedeung (the highest post of government) Bidam in 647. The name Bidam (毘曇), originates from a book of the Hinayana Sutra, one of the Buddhist scriptures, while the name Chunchu (春秋), derives from an iconic history book written by none other than Confucius himself. The fact that the two most powerful figures in Silla during the first half of the seventh century borrowed their names from Buddhism and Confucianism respectively neatly symbolizes the changes of the time and the ongoing shift in political and

state ideology from Buddhism to Confucianism. Bidam declared his ideal for the country as 'a coalition of *jingol*, or true-bone royals,' and Buddhism as the ruling ideology of the country. Chunchu, on the other hand, adopted Confucius' concept of royal statesmanship, and sought to establish the royal authority and sovereignty on firm foundations.

Nevertheless, Buddhism remained the dominant ideology of Silla. Buddhism had served to consolidate the royal authority of Silla by through the idealistic Buddhist ideas such as the Chakravarti King (轉輪聖王) or such statements as "the king is the Buddha himself" (王卽佛). Buddhist monks led and educated the Hwarangdo. The religious power of Buddhism was accepted as a tool for resolving conflict and believed to unite the nation, as well as playing a pivotal role in nurturing patriotism. Though effective it had fatal limitations: it could not provide a well-established political system to cope with national and international crises. Buddhism was a religion, not a system of state management.

This is why Confucianism started encroaching into Silla's political and cultural arena. Ever since the reign of King Jinpyeong, Chinese and Confucian proprieties and principles had supplied the ideological foundations of government organization and the moral ethics of ordinary people. The great Buddhist monk Wongwang's Five Commandments for a Secular Life (*Sesok ogye* 世俗五戒) exemplified this trend. The Stone Tablet with Inscription of the Oath of the Imsin Year was erected in 612 (34th year of the reign of King Jinpyeong of Silla) to solidify the determination of two Silla youths. The stone shows the influence of the Confucian classics, most particularly *The Book of Odes* (詩經), *The Book of History* (尚書), *The Book of Rites* (禮記), and *Zuo zhuan* (左傳, Zuo's Tradition of the Spring and Autumn Annals) on the young people of Silla. Their devotion to the country is palpable, and their three-year study plan is simply adorable. A popular motto among the ruling circles was taken from the *Analects of Confucius*: "We cannot fully appreciate the true color of pine trees until winter has come." Gangsu, one of the greatest writers of the Silla era, chose the study of Confucianism over Buddhism upon his father's enquiry about his subject choices, referring to Buddhism as otherworldly. It was clear that Confucianism was winning over the ideological struggle. Armed with Confucian principles and ideology, the young members of the elite had become the main empowering force behind Kim Chunchu's reformist policies, domestic and foreign.

Among all other reasons, it was the willingness of members of the Silla

royal circle that enabled the invited Confucianism to rise and shine. Silla's Confucian elites were fluent in Chinese and ran tax, military and administrative affairs effectively with their advanced documentation skills. Confucianism was not only an efficient tool of government, but also provided a body of precepts for society. It upheld the principles of filial piety and loyalty, as shown in the Stone Tablet of Year 612. Confucianism confined each member of society to a predefined role and position through insidious teachings such as *gun-gun-sin-sin* (君臣臣), which means "the superior should be superior and the subordinate should be subordinate." There would be no equals, only transcendental sovereignty and absolute loyalty. Royal statesmanship was supposed to encompass the literary and martial arts for the love of the people. This rationalized the war propaganda of redemption, diverting attention away from the devastating nature of war and destruction.

The young Kim Chunchu must have been very conscious of his distinctly different Confucian name as Bidam, a Buddhist name, was a typical and popular choice of name for male children at that time. We can imagine how he took his early experiences through his sons' cases. His sons were identified as the first young people of Silla, who were given their courtesy name (*ja*, 字) at the Confucian style capping ceremony in which one is acknowledged as a grown-up. In 648, when Kim Chunchu met Emperor Taizong of Tang, the first and foremost thing he requested was to be permitted to attend Confucian lectures and rituals at the National Confucian College. Upon his return to Silla, he laid the foundations of the national Confucian college. It all began with the name. Centralized administration, reformist policies, the accommodation of Confucian practices, and unconventional foreign and domestic policies all helped to consolidate the great kingdom of Silla.

### Queen Jindeok and the Meaning of Her Crown

Kim Chunchu and Kim Yusin gained full control of Silla's political scene after subjugating the revolt of the former Sangdaedeung Bidam and other formerly powerful figures including Yeomjong in January 647. Bidam claimed that a queen could not properly rule a country, but Kim Chunchu and his power circles presented yet another woman to succeed Queen Seondeok. The new queen was Jindeok, the twenty-eighth ruler of Silla (r. 647–654). Kim Chunchu assembled the alienated lower bone-ranks and

local forces and rearranged them as his power base. He expanded the administrative organization of the country to include certain underprivileged groups and established a centralized system working for the royal sovereignty. That, of course, provoked severe resistance from the *jingol* and Daedeung forces who naturally wished to maintain their advantageous position within the previous system of aristocracy.

King Beopheung and all subsequent kings tried to strengthen the royal authority, each calling himself the 'Supreme King.' But they do not appear to have been particularly successful in ensuring the royal authority. The dethronement of King Jinji by the powerful *jingol* families exemplified the precarious royal sovereignty of the Silla kings. Silla was a castle built upon a coalition of the *jingol* aristocracy and the king. They shared and managed the economic and military territory consisting of tax villages and stipend villages. The coalition system worked well in an ancient kingdom whose productive capacity was very vulnerable to natural disasters. It proved to be a more flexible system of governance for coping with financial crises caused by the extreme adversity of nature rather than the king's exclusive monopoly over the power and finances of the country.

Thus, as a system it had various merits, but it was still largely dependent on the willing cooperation of the *jingol*. The king always made decisions and policies through consultation with the assembly of the *jingol* aristocracy, which was composed of high-ranking nobles known as Daedeung. It is assumed that its members were recommended by the *jingol* families and ratified by the king, as seen in Goguryeo, such as the appointment of the Daedaero (equivalent to the prime minister) and succession to the post of Budaein by the powerful family of Yeon Gaesomun. The Sangdaedeung, who led the Daedeung assembly, was appointed by the king but could not be said to be on the king's side. He was one of the Daedeung, after all.

The *jingol* also wanted Silla to develop and flourish, but they could not tolerate the king's monopoly of power nor any of their privileges being curtailed by the king. Therefore, the *jingol*, who did not want the king's power to grow, kept a close watch on the rapid growth of power of royalists such as Kim Yongchun—a member of Chunchu's family—and Kim Seohyeon—a member of Kim Yusin's family.

The *jingol* also acknowledged that the adoption of a centralized governing system was inevitable. The endless struggle against Goguryeo and Baekje became increasingly fierce, requiring the tactical channeling of all national

resources in order to navigate the kingdom safely through such turbid and unpredictable circumstances. Divided leadership was not helping the situation. The *jingols* fears about the curtailment of their privileges, however, were far greater than their fears about the national crisis. They didn't trust the reformation or the reinforced royal initiative. Their awareness of the situation, however, varied according to their interests and their point of view. The only common perception was that it could be potentially harmful. The privileged elite lost the holistic spectrum and drifted away with the people of Silla on board.

Queen Seondeok of Silla found a solution in diplomacy and took the initiative by forming an alliance with Tang, while Emperor Taejong of Tang insulted her envoy, asserting that Silla faced constant threats from its neighboring countries because its head of state was a woman. To make matters worse, Kim Pumseok, Kim Chunchu's son-in-law, surrendered and ceded Daeya Fortress to Baekje after a series of misconducts, which resulted in the queen and her royalists losing even more support. Located on the west bank of the Nakdong River, Daeya Fortress (present Hapcheon region) was strategically important. All of the forty or so fortresses in the region previously under Gaya's dominion before its submission to Silla were lost along with Daeya Fortress. This meant that Silla was no longer protected by the Sobaek Mountain Range. Now that only the Nakdong River lay between Silla and Baekje, it seemed to be only a matter of time before Gyeongju, the capital of Silla, would fall.

Out of sheer desperation Kim Chunchu felt obliged to request Goguryeo to dispatch troops to assist Silla, but Yeon Gaesomun, the supreme power of Goguryeo, refused to lend a helping hand. Emperor Taejong of Tang attempted to invade Goguryeo but was frustrated when he lost the battle of Ansi (安市城) in 645. Baekje took control of seven fortresses on Silla's western border, while Silla's army marched north to help Tang's Goguryeo expedition. But the situation was not improving. Popular sentiment was in turmoil and the queen's leadership foundered. Even the perpetually-blind, self-seeking upper classes could now see that the country was on the brink of collapse and all their privileges were in jeopardy.

The fact that there was no male *Seonggol* (Sacred Bone, the lineage of the highest-ranking family) left to succeed Queen Seondeok increased the people's anxiety about their country's fate. No man from the rightful *Seonggol* family had been available even prior to the reign of Queen Seondeok. The rule established by King Jinpyeong, who had handed the crown to Queen Seondeok, demanded another queen. The *jingol* were reluctant. Silla could

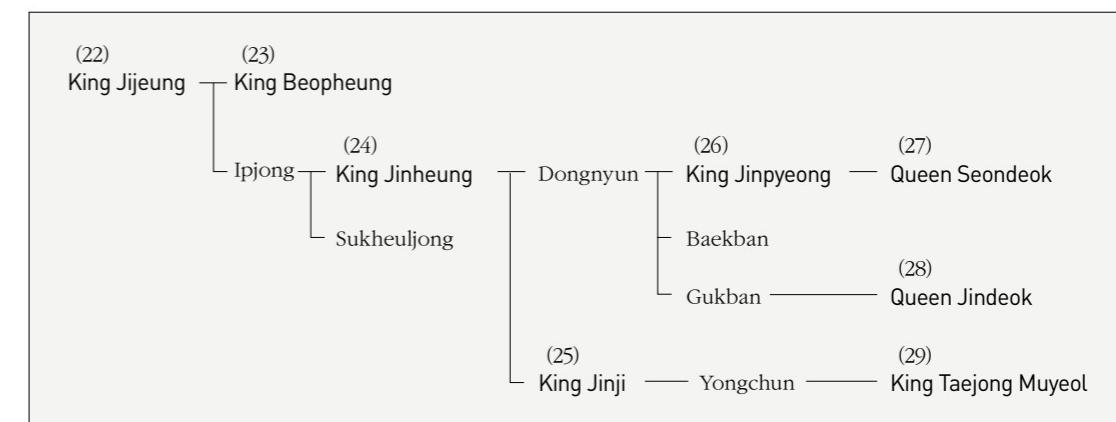


Fig 1. Genealogy of Silla Kings from King Jinheung to King Taejong Muyeol

not afford yet another queen in a war situation such as prevailed at that time. Finally, Sangdaedeung Bidam allied the forces of the *jingol* and raised a revolt in 647, under the motto: "A woman is not fit to rule a country."

But Bidam was defeated by the forces of Kim Chunchu and Kim Yusin, a well-thought-out preparation by King Jinpyeong and Queen Seondeok. Having annihilated the rebel forces of Lord Bidam, Kim Chunchu seized a golden opportunity to put his political vision into practice. Bidam's rebellion served as a decisive moment for change. The royalists were able to establish a system of centralized government after winning the long-standing confrontations and struggles against the aristocrats. Kim Chunchu presented another queen as if to disprove Bidam's argument to the effect that a female monarch could not properly rule a country. Perhaps if he had insisted, he could have become the king himself, but he wanted all to know that there was something untouchable: royal sovereignty. It was a loud and clear statement of the divine and absolute right of Silla royalty, which would brook no interference by mere vassals.

### Kim Chunchu's Visit to Tang: Its Significance and Implications

In 648 AD, a year after Queen Jindeok's enthronement, Kim Chunchu visited Tang to personally meet Emperor Taizong. He would not have done that unless it was absolutely necessary. He was almost sixty years old and in full control of Silla's new political arena. He could have let somebody else take the risks and

deal with all the problems associated with diplomatic negotiations. But he went to China in person as if Silla's fate depended upon its relations with Tang. He gambled on his visit to Tang being the best way of overcoming both domestic and foreign obstacles and of realizing the Silla kingdom of his dreams to its full potential. If he succeeded in his diplomatic negotiations with Tang as planned, he would gain political security and a cultural bridgehead at the same time, thereby regenerating Silla in the foreseeable future.

It is noteworthy that Kim's primary request upon his arrival was to attend Confucian lectures and rituals at the National Confucian College. Seokjeon (釋奠) was a memorial rite to commemorate Confucius; and Gukhak (國學) was a national college for Confucian education. The request itself implied that Kim was strongly drawn to Confucianism and the culture of Tang, demanding Emperor Taizong's attention. It also displayed Kim's ambition to reform the state system of Silla by employing Confucian ideology. Kim Chunchu had long been interested in fostering the national elites through Confucian education. When Kim put his fascination with Confucianism and Tang's education system before any other diplomatic purposes, Emperor Taizong welcomed him wholeheartedly, offering his own handwritten epigraphs of Wentangbei (溫湯碑) and Jincibei (晉祠碑) and a newly published history book titled *Jinshu* (晉書). Kim was even granted a Special Promotion Rank (特進), a title second only to the monarch of Silla, in what was a courteous gesture of acknowledgement of the future king of Silla.

Kim Chunchu, of course, had a hidden agenda. But he did not behave like previous envoys who had begged for Tang's protection from Goguryeo and Baekje. He took his time until Emperor Taizong could no longer hold back his curiosity. When the emperor was very ready to listen and consider, Kim elaborated on Silla's situation. The talks remained secret until the fierce military engagements between Silla and Tang in later days took place. When Silla resisted Tang's attempt to establish its dominion over the entire Korean Peninsula by taking control of the former territory of Baekje, General Xue Rengui of Tang sent a written protest to King Munmu of Silla. The latter replied by emphasizing the promises made by Emperor Taizong in that closed meeting between the emperor and his father Kim Chunchu. It was then revealed that Emperor Taizong had personally promised Kim that he would strike Goguryeo without any attempt to acquire territory or spoils of war. The emperor, it was said, also proposed that the entire region of Baekje be handed over to Silla once Baekje and Goguryeo were subjugated.

Emperor Taizong of Tang indeed adopted a new campaign strategy consisting of a Silla-Tang alliance to conquer Goguryeo, as Kim Chunchu had suggested, which meant making dramatic changes in strategy from simply waging military campaigns of defense against Goguryeo to conquest of Baekje and then Goguryeo. The important fact here was Tang's changing perception of Baekje. Baekje used to be a closer ally of Tang, sending it tribute and delegations more often than Silla. Kim Chunchu persuaded Emperor Taizong by reminding him of the bitter experience of his failed expeditions against Goguryeo.

As already mentioned, when Tang fought against Goguryeo in 645 AD, Silla supported Tang's campaign with 30,000 troops, while Baekje attacked Silla. Silla had lost seven fortresses as a result of helping Tang. According to *The Book of Sui* (*Suishu*, 隋書), Emperor Taizong intuitively understood Baekje's pro-Goguryeo policy all along. Having already been humiliated at the battle of Ansi (安市城), Emperor Taizong needed Silla's military aid to disperse Goguryeo's compact military forces in the Liao River region and to organize military provisions, which proved to be the biggest problem in the siege of Pyeongyang. In the end both Emperor Taizong and Kim Chunchu responded to each other's interests and agreed to conquer Baekje first in a bid to secure Silla as a southern stronghold from which to attack Goguryeo. Although the date of the assault was not yet fixed, the whole campaign strategy had been planned in advance. The Silla-Tang alliance would defeat Baekje and then Goguryeo. It was a brilliant plan and a diplomatic victory on Kim's part, and ultimately led to Baekje's ruin.

Kim Chunchu returned to Silla with news of the diplomatic coup of the Silla-Tang alliance. He proved himself extremely capable of political maneuvering, and his stature had grown accordingly. He laid the groundwork for a new system of governance involving the proactive implementation of the Tang system. His aim was to let international and domestic society know of the Silla-Tang alliance and to pave his way to the crown. The first project was the adoption of the official uniform for the bureaucrats of Tang by Silla in AD 649. When Silla delegates dressed in official Tang uniforms were sent to Wae in AD 651, a diplomatic crisis broke out. Some Wae people were so shocked that they called for a war against Silla. A simple change of uniform had demonstrated to all neighboring countries that the powerful Tang Dynasty was on Silla's side, which was exactly what Kim Chunchu had counted on.

But this was just a glimpse of the new Silla. In 650 AD Kim let the *jingol*

take the supreme mace and abandoned Silla's own era name in favor of the one, namely, the Yonghui (永徽) Era. Then Queen Jindeok personally weaved a silk tapestry of a eulogy depicting the peaceful reign of Emperor Gaozong of Tang, which was personally carried by Kim Chunchu's son, Beopmin (法敏). Everything was done to flaunt Silla's newfound status as an integral element of the Tang-centered world.

### The First Step toward Absolute Monarchy

Kim Chunchu's pro-Tang policy was not just a diplomatic strategy; he also aimed to adopt Chinese political ideology, Confucian values and state rituals and ultimately to reinforce Silla's sovereignty and centralized system of government. Kim Chunchu took his first step toward achieving these aims by introducing far-reaching political reforms in 651 AD, the fifth year of the reign of Queen Jindeok.

Kim Chunchu closed the Pumju (稟主 Finance and Intelligence Office) and divided it into the *Jipsabu* (執事部 Chancellery Office) and the Changbu (倉部 Finance Office) in a bid to strengthen sovereign control over the state secretariat and the national finances. The *Jipsabu* was directly under the control of the royal office and dealt with information and intelligence matters. It upheld royal assignments and administered other departments and offices of the state. He also put the *Sangsaseo* (賞賜署 Office of Awards) which rewarded members of the state for their meritorious deeds and services for the country, under the Finance Office. Kim Chunchu also initiated a merit system to encourage loyalty and devotion. Step by step he gained control over the national finances and economy with the aid of the Finance Office. He cultivated the fidelity of junior *sarim* officials with recognition and rewards from the Office of Awards under the Finance Office.

One crucial point in the reform program of 651 was the reorganization of the central government administration into a four-rank system consisting of Secretary (*Yeong*, 令), Deputy Secretary (*Gyeong*, 卿), executive Secretary (*Daesa*, 大舍) and Under Secretary (*Sa*, 史). Another was that it laid the foundations for the establishment of a national academy to train the administrative elites. Initially, it simply consisted of academic and administrative staff, the former being doctors and assistants, the latter being senior and junior officers. Small though it was, it was a good enough

breeding ground for the nurturing of highly competent administrators, and Kim Chunchu was the one who planted the seeds. The establishment of a national academy was also closely related to the creation of a four-rank system of administration, which divided duties and established an efficient chain of command. To make the system work, a good supply of efficient personnel was required. The national academy played a fundamental role in realizing the four-rank system.

Before the national academy there was the Hwarangdo (花郎徒) or the Circle of Young Knights. Candidates for the Circle of Young Knights were selected through the *jingol*. In fact, it was done by the nomination of the aristocrats. The relationship between the *Hwarang* (花郎 Leaders of Young Knights) and the *Rangdo* (郎徒 Young Knights) was more personal than official. When young knights were nominated and selected by the leaders, they were honor bound to serve the families of the leaders. The system worked for the time being, but was not sustainable for a new country that had adopted a new Confucian ideology and established a centralized system of royal government. This was the main reason why Kim Chunchu wanted to learn from Confucian lectures and rituals at the National Confucian College, and subsequently laid the foundations for the National Academy of Silla.

During the humble preliminary stages of the National Academy in Queen Jindeok's reign, only low-ranking posts were given. It even appears not to have had a proper name. Kim Chunchu sought not to invite unnecessary attention or resistance. Lord Bidam had gone, but there were still powerful *jingol* families that were reluctant to comply with Kim's reforms. It was a time of war and no internal resources were to be wasted. Kim Chunchu knew when to prepare, when to lie low, and when to advance. The National Confucian College was eventually fully established during the reign of King Sinmun, Kim Chunchu's grandson.

The Royal Guard (*Siwibu*, 侍衛府) was formed in the fifth year of Queen Jindeok's reign. Consisting of three units and considerably larger and more powerful than the previous Royal Corps (*Siwigam*, 侍衛監), it was specifically designed to boost the royal authority while having sufficient strength to quell any rebels of the *jingol* faction or any other nobles. All of these reforms of the Chancellery Office and the Finance Office along with the formation of the Royal Guard were intended to support the sovereign power of the Silla royal family.

Furthermore, in the fifth year of Queen Jindeok's reign, the Ministry of Rites

(Yebu, 禮部) was thoroughly overhauled into three offices, the Eumseongseo (音聲署), Daedoseo (大道署, also called Sajeon or Naedogam) and Jeonsaseo (典祀署), which were responsible for managing music, temples, and rituals respectively. Music was inseparable from Confucian rituals, which were refined to perfection through music. These bureaus performed dominant roles in the Hajeongnye (賀正禮), exercised in the first lunar month in the fifth year of Queen Jindeok's reign for the first time in Silla's history. The Hajeongnye was a ceremony in which the queen or king received greetings from all of the government officials when they gathered at the beginning of the year. Held at the Jowonjeon (朝元殿), the main hall of the palace, this ceremony epitomized supreme and absolute sovereignty. The eyes of the whole country were now fixed on one body only, namely, the queen. Kim Chunchu knew how to visualize the royal authority through Confucian ritual. Accordingly, the national rituals became more dignified and displayed a hitherto unseen level of grandeur after Kim himself became the royal authority.

Kim Chunchu undertook all this hard work not only on behalf of the queen he had enthroned. All these preliminary works were carefully executed with one prospective king in mind. The new royal statesmanship could only be effective once all the pertinent systems had been established, and all the available resources marshaled, in advance. It also required powerful groups of supporters whom Kim never neglected to cultivate. He was now fully prepared for imminent succession to the throne of the Silla Kingdom, a goal that had been extremely difficult for him to achieve.

### Kim Chunchu Finally Becomes the King

Kim Chunchu was not the first choice to succeed to the throne when Queen *Jindeok* died in AD 654. The Hwabaekhoeui, or General Assembly of the Daedeung, decided that Sangdaedeung Alcheon should act as a regent for the time being. A regent was usually only appointed when the successor was very young or when there was no rightful successor to be found. The appointment of a regent meant there was no specific plan in preparation after the queen's death.

With all due courtesy, however, Alcheon refused the offer. There was no other option but to offer the crown to Kim Chunchu as his power and intentions were all too obvious. During Queen Jindeok's reign, Kim

Chunchu's allies, including Kim Yusin and other powerful new nobles, had accumulated enough power to support Kim Chunchu's enthronement. No one, not even Prime Minister Alcheon, could resist Kim Chunchu's power base. So Alcheon took the initiative and nominated Kim Chunchu for the crown, praising his virtues as a king. Kim Chunchu declined the offer three times but eventually accepted to be the de facto king. Kim's refusals were not simply a show of following the typical procedures in accordance with Confucian lessons. Kim wanted to make sure that the General Assembly, which had deposed his grandfather King Jinji, had to literally beg him to become king. It was a ritual procedure designed to recover his family's lost royal status and to justify his succession as the rightful heir.

Upon ascending to the throne, King Taejong Muyeol, formerly Kim Chunchu, conferred the posthumous title of kingship, Munheung *Daewang* (文興大王, King Munheung the Great), upon his father Yongchun and the posthumous title of queenship, Munjeong Taehu (文貞太后, Queen Dowager Munjeong), upon his mother Lady Cheonmyeong, and declared his rightful royal status. There were various views about the year in which Omyoje (五廟制, Five-Shrine System) was first practiced: some have suggested that it began in King Munmu's reign, others that it began in King Simmun's. Given that the Chubongdaewangje (追封大王制, Institution of Posthumous Enthronement) was effective during King Muyeol's reign, it appears that the Posthumous Enthronement Act may have been added to the Five-Shrine system, which was already in place. As such, it is only logical to conjecture that the Five-Shrine system was introduced by King Taejong Muyeol.

Kim Yongchun, Kim Chunchu's father, was to have been enthroned if King Jinji had not been dethroned. Upon acceding to the throne, Kim Chunchu first granted his late father the title of *Galmunwang* (葛文王), a high-ranking title equivalent to that of the king that was usually granted to the clan chiefs of the reigning king. This, however, was not enough for him. After introducing the Chinese Five-Shrine system, he overhauled the traditional Silla Shrine system completely. The Five-Shrine System allowed the enshrinement of the uncrowned direct ancestors of the reigning king at the royal ancestral shrine. The dethroned King Jinji and Kim Yongchun, who had never been enthroned, were both reinstated as late great kings by Kim Chunchu, their own direct descendant. It was a dramatic and symbolic gesture designed to raise Kim's status. While the Middle Ancient Period members of royalty tried to differentiate themselves from the *jingol* by way of the Buddhist rituals of

the True Bone, King Taejong Muyeol embraced the new Confucian rituals in a bid to give the royal authority of the Middle Period an aura of sanctity.

### State Rites and Legal Reform

Having observed the effects of the Confucian ritual formalities of Tang at the national scale, the new king understood the necessity of those rites and rituals: the visualization of royal authority. As previously mentioned, for the first time in the history of Silla, Kim Chunchu introduced the Hajeongnye, a New Year's Greeting Ceremony involving all the government officials. The *Daeirimjeon*, which was instituted in AD 657, the fourth year of the reign of King Muyeol, epitomized another of King Muyeol's plans for promoting royal authority.

The officials of the Daeirimjeon consisted of *jeonui* (典儀), who were responsible for publicizing rites and rituals, *jeonal* (典謁) and *jeonin* (典引), who acted as process managers of the rituals, and *jeonsa* (典事). All these posts were introduced for the good management of national rites and rituals in much the same way as similar positions in Tang and Goryeo officialdom. Other ritual-related posts such as *sangindo* (上引道), *wiindo* (位引道), *gwanindo* (官引道), which were presumably designed purely for national rituals, could also be found in the *indojeon* (引道典) which belonged to the Naeseong (內省), Office for the Royal Family and Palace Management. These professional officials came into existence during early Mid-Silla, refining the national rituals to a very sophisticated level and supporting King Muyeol's intention of using the rituals for enhancing royal sovereignty.

All rituals are characterized by strict formalization. The officiants and other officials involved in the rituals naturally played the most important roles in the process. They had to be fully versed in every aspect of the whole procedure and ensure that everything went smoothly in order to maintain an immaculate aura of dignity throughout the rituals, as this would be the very foundation of the central authority. Rituals were designed to embody the proper propriety and relationship between center and periphery, rulers and subjects, and superiors and subordinates. The more complex the ritual, the more clearly defined the relationship was. That grandeur, the long period of standing upright and the repeated act of bowing down, required infinite patience. And by doing so, the center acquired authority while the peripheries were

acquainted with the superior-subordinate relationship.

The Daeirimjeon may have been the bureau responsible for the Hajeongnye, the New Year's Greeting Ceremony, in which all the government officials participated. The Hajeongnye was held in the Jowonjeon, which was located at the center of the palace. It was not just the government officials, however, who bowed down to the monarch in this ceremony; rather, it was the whole country of Silla that knelt down to the one and only ruler of the Silla Kingdom. Letters from local governors to the king were also delivered during the ceremony. The grand finale would have been staged with a shout of acclamation by all government officials. At the same time local governors and other village heads would have gathered together and bowed down in the direction of the king during their own greeting ceremonies. The formality of such local rites of bowing toward the palace was an integral part of the process by which the central government embraced and subordinated the local forces. The essence of these rites and rituals was to confirm the flow of power. It was intended that the entire nation see and feel the absolute power of the royal status at the center of the universe through the tangible process of this ritual.

Upon his enthronement King Taejong Muyeol built up the governing codes of law, enacting sixty more articles of the Order of the Ministry of Justice, or *Ibangbugyeok* (理方府格). The Ibangbu was a government office founded by Kim Chunchu himself in the fifth year of Queen Jindeok's reign to take charge of legislation and penal codes. By 667 AD, the seventh year of King Munmu's reign, the office had been expanded and reorganized into two offices, namely, the First and the Second Ibangbu, which played a key role in sustaining Middle Silla. The Ibangbugyeok was introduced to improve the existing codes of criminal and administrative law with reference to the regulations, orders, codes and rules of the Tang. The codes (格, *gyeok*) in the law of Tang supplemented the existing regulations with orders (勅, *chik*) from the emperor, which would stipulate new rules on new and complex circumstances. Not every imperial order was included in the law though. Only orders characterized by consistency and continuity could survive the passage of time and the elimination process and become fully established in the book of law. Orders which became fully embedded in the law were called *gyeok* (格, code of law). The code of law had been enhanced and gained independence from its higher laws and regulations.

King Munmu, too, commanded the reform of Silla's the regulations,

orders, codes, and rules (*yullyeonggyeoksik*, 律令格式), in his will in 681, the 21st year of his reign. Thus, during the early period of Middle Silla, there were constant efforts to support reformations by law, proving the maturity of Silla's legal system. Silla had adapted Tang's systems and managed to modify them according to its own circumstances. Kim Chunchu's acculturation of Chinese culture and systems was ingenious, never neglecting the reality of Silla at each and every stage of reformation and development.

In AD 655, the second year of King Taejong Muyeol's reign, the king's first son Beopmin was proclaimed as crown prince while his other sons were empowered with high governmental positions. In AD 656 he appointed his second son Kim Inmun as Gunju (軍主), the Master of the Army, upon the latter's return from China, while in AD 658 he appointed his other son Munwang as Chief Minister of the Chancellery Office upon his return from China. In 660 AD the king appointed the ever-reliable Kim Yusin, a key agent in King Muyeol's enthronement, and the king's sister's husband to the post of Sangdaedeung, or prime minister. Thus, by installing all the most trusted members of his family and friends in the right places, he had succeeded in stabilizing and consolidating the royal authority much more effectively than ever before.

The appointment of Kim Yusin as Sangdaedeung had another meaning. Kim had one fatal political flaw he was a descendant of a defeated people, Gaya. He was not actually eligible for the position of Sangdaedeung, as the very top position was traditionally only assigned to the most powerful aristocrat. Kim's appointment meant that the top government post no longer worked in favor of the aristocrats. Now that it was a co-agent of the royal authority, it was inevitable that the power of the nobles as a more or less unified body would decline. During the Middle Silla Period the power of the king's people grew ever stronger. The Chancellor and the Chief Minister of the Chancellery Office, which delivered the king's command to government bureaus for the efficient execution of their duties, had more power than ever before. King Taejong Muyeol had succeeded in covering his back through his skillful diplomacy with the Tang, while coordinating his front with his close associates and the faithful members of his family. Having carefully planned and executed a series of reforms to stabilize his sovereign power, King Taejong Muyeol proceeded to the next phase. He launched a campaign to conquer Baekje.

## 2

# Demise of Baekje and Goguryeo and Unification of the Three Kingdoms

## The Invasion of the Silla-Tang China Alliance and Fall of Baekje

Tang decided to conquer Baekje in October AD 659 and immediately began making the necessary preparations. As the decision was strictly confidential, even its own ally, Silla, was not informed until March AD 660, when Tang's expedition was almost ready. Foreign visitors including Kim Inmun, Kim Chunchu's second son, and Japanese envoys were not allowed to leave the country in order to keep the planned invasion a secret. Finally, some 130,000 troops set out for Baekje from Laizhou (萊州, Bongnae in Shandong Province), on the 18th day of the sixth lunar month, AD 660. The view of a massive fleet of 1,900 ships setting sail was spectacular and is said to have stretched for a thousand miles.

In alliance with Tang's forces, King Taejong Muyeol led his army of 50,000 Silla troops to Namcheonjeong (南川停, present-day Icheon in Gyeonggi-do) rather than to Sabi (泗沘), the capital of Baekje. The king took a detour to throw the main defense force of Baekje into confusion while taking advantage of easier communication with Tang's troops. Crown Prince Beopmin welcomed General Su Dingfang (蘇定方) of Tang and his army at Deongmuldo (德物島, present-day Deokjeok Island in Gyeonggi-do) on the 21st day of the sixth lunar month. They planned to assemble each force,

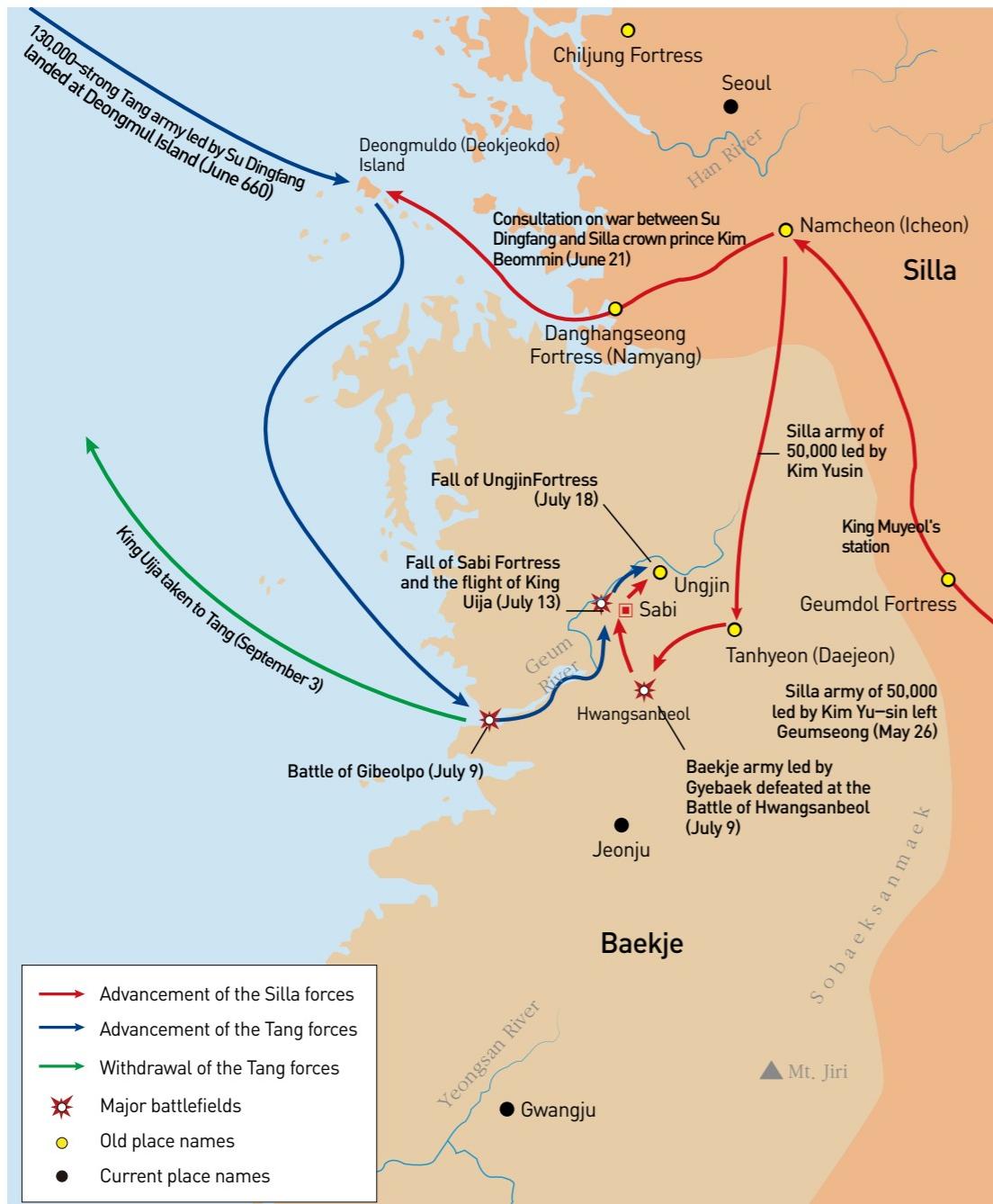


Fig 2. Silla-Tang Allied Invasion of Baekje

advancing south toward Sabi, by land and sea routes respectively, on the 10th day of the seventh lunar month.

Guided by Silla's navy, Tang's huge fleet followed the coastal route via Namyang Bay (南陽灣), Taean and Anmyeon Island before finally arriving at the port of Gibeolpo (伎伐浦) on the Geum River estuary. Meanwhile, King Taejong Muyeol and his army marched south to Geumdal (今突城, present-day Sangju in Gyeongsangbuk-do), passing via Sarajjeong (沙羅之停, present-day Cheongju in Chungcheongbuk-do), while General Kim Yusin and his army of 50,000 Silla troops went via Tanhyeon (炭峴), the key strategic point for an advance into Baekje. To strike at Sabi, which was located near the middle reaches of the Geum River, the Tang army followed the mainstream of the Geum River from Gibeolpo, while Silla approached from the opposite direction, advancing along the upper reaches of the Geum River. Both Gibeolpo and Tanhyeon were strategically critical positions leading directly to Baekje's capital city of Sabi. Neither of the armies met with any resistance, however, and early in the seventh lunar month, AD 660 a large allied force of 180,000 soldiers attacked Baekje, which remained seemingly oblivious of the approaching threat. To make matters worse, Baekje did not deal with the impending danger even after acknowledging the situation.

It was only after the large army of Tang arrived at Deongmul Island that the rulers of Baekje realized the urgency of the matter and tried to devise strategies to cope with the national crisis, failing miserably. They were disturbed by the Silla-Tang alliance. The attacks were too swift, Sabi was in the front line of the attack, and enemies were swarming everywhere on sea and land alike. The timing was not right for Baekje either. At that point in time King Uija of Baekje was caught up in conflicts with the Baekje aristocracy as he too tried to enforce policies aimed at reinforcing royal authority. Even with the allied forces moving ever closer, the opinions of those with responsibility were divided. Baekje's great general Gyebaek (階伯) and 5,000 men who had committed themselves to fight to the death put up a brave resistance against the much larger Silla army at Hwangsaneol (黃山伐). Unfortunately, Gyebaek was killed in action with all of his men, only succeeding in postponing the collapse of their country by a few more days.

King Uija, for his part, did his utmost: he dispatched his best men and princes to Tang's expeditionary camp along with his personal letter of apology. He begged for Tang to retreat from the field with food and gifts. He sought absolution for whatever he had done without knowledge of the

circumstances. Naturally, General Su Dingfang (蘇定方) of Tang rejected all his pleas and strengthened the siege. Surrounded by four corps of the allied forces, Sabi was on the brink of surrender. On the 13th day of the seventh lunar month, under cover of the night, King Uija escaped from Sabi and fled to Ungjin (熊津, present-day Gongju in Chungcheongnam-do), having unsuccessfully attempted to steel himself for battle. The provincial governor of Ungjin, Ye Sikjin (禰寔進), to whom the desperate king had turned, simply surrendered, which ultimately led to the king's capture. Thus, on the 18th day of the seventh lunar month, King Uija had no other choice but to capitulate; on the 29th day of the seventh lunar month King Taejong Muyeol arrived at Sabi (泗沘城) from Geumdol (今突城), and on the 2nd day of the eighth lunar month King Uija paid a tribute of wine to King Taejong Muyeol and General Su Dingfang with all the members of the royal family and many subjects watching on. The king's humiliation, however, was not as great as the wailing of the crowd. Seven hundred years of brilliant and sophisticated culture and history had simply vanished in a couple of days without anyone putting up a proper fight. In the ninth lunar month, General Su returned to Tang in triumph with the fallen king, the entire royal family, the ministers and 12,000 people of the fallen country as spoils of war, leaving 10,000 Tang soldiers and 7,000 Silla soldiers behind as an army of occupation.

### The Short-lived Baekje Revival Movement

The demise of Baekje was more the fault of its flustered government than military weakness. As the battles raged mainly in the central areas of Sabi and Ungjin, most of Baekje's military strength in the regions remained intact, meaning Baekje was not finished yet. And just when the Silla-Tang alliance thought they had won the war against Baekje with King Uija's surrender, the real war began. For three long years after the fall of the capital city, there were pockets of fierce resistance and fights to resurrect Baekje.

At first the resistance was disorganized and sporadic, being largely the natural reaction of ordinary commoners against the brutal plundering and killing of Tang's occupation army. Leaders soon appeared, such as Boksin (福信) and Dochim (道琛), who gradually organized and led the people's rage that had been scattered far and wide. Boksin invited Buyeo Pung (夫餘豐), the fallen prince of Baekje to leave his place of exile in Japan to take the

throne, and at the same time asked for Japanese cooperation and support, which was immediately and freely given. Japan sent between 30,000 and 40,000 troops equipped with almost unlimited resources.

Initially the cradles of the Baekje Revival were such places as leaders' birthplaces, power bases, and official posts, as in the cases of Heukchisangji (黑齒常之) and Boksin. The king of Baekje might have surrendered, but the regional governing system of 5 *bang* (方), 37 *gun* (郡) and 200 *seong* (城) had not collapsed at all. The regional governors had sufficient determination and strength to join the resistance. The Tang army, having occupied Sabi,



Fig 3. Strongholds of the Baekje Restoration Army

was isolated several times. The ire of the people fired up the Baekje Revival Movement in the north and west regions of Baekje, and by AD 661 it had flared up in the south and east regions, quickly followed by the rest of the country. Two hundred more fortresses were claimed to have been recovered. Facing this unexpectedly ferocious resistance, Tang hurriedly dispatched additional troops, while King Munmu of Silla personally led an army to annihilate the Revival Movement.

In the seventh lunar month, AD 662 Silla built the Ungjin Road (熊津道) to raise the siege of the isolated army of Tang. Then the Silla-Tang alliance followed a more aggressive strategy and started rolling the revival forces back. As it happened, there were internal conflicts between the leaders of the Revival Movement. Boksin killed Dochim and continued to cause friction with Prince Buyeo Pung, who eventually had Boksin executed in AD 663. This aggravated power struggle drove people away from the cause. Some opted for submission while others refused to remain loyal to Prince Buyeo Pung. In the early days of the movement, the revival forces got enough supplies from the southern Baekje area, which abounded with agricultural products. Inexorably, however, the farmland was taken over by Silla, and food and supplies from Japan were cut off, too. As a consequence the revival movement forces suffered from a shortage of supplies and began to lose their strength.

In July AD 663 King Munmu of Silla, along with Kim Yusin and another twenty-eight generals, launched a full-scale assault on Juryuseong (周留城), the base of the Baekje revival movement. The Silla-Tang alliance devised a plan to overwhelm Juryuseong through Garimseong (加林城, present-day Imcheon in Chungcheongnam-do), which was a strategic point for naval and land attacks. King Munmu and his army were joined by Tang soldiers, led by Generals Yu Inwon (劉仁願) and Son Insa (孫仁師), who together took the land route while the main Tang force approached by way of Baekganggu, (白江口, present-day Geum River estuary). Meanwhile, the naval forces, led by Admirals Yu Ingwe (劉仁軌) and *Du Sang* (杜爽), were joined by the former Crown Prince of Baekje, Buyeo Yung (夫餘).

The Baekje revival movement forces at Juryuseong requested reinforcements from Goguryeo and Japan. Goguryeo, fearing a flanking attack by Tang, could not respond. Japan, on the other hand, sent much-needed reinforcements and threw them into a big battle against the Silla-Tang alliance. On the 18th day of the eighth lunar month, AD 663, the Silla-

Tang alliance besieged Juryuseong. On the 27th day of the eighth lunar month, the Tang navy won a major victory against the Japanese navy and the revival forces led by King Pung (Buyeo Pung), who fled to Goguryeo after a fleet of 400 Baekje ships was destroyed. Encouraged by this victory, the allied forces went on to capture Juryuseong on the 7th day of the ninth lunar month. The displaced revival forces and the remaining people of Juryuseong went into exile in Japan.

Silla took advantage of this opportunity to expand its dominance over the former Baekje territory. Tang dispatched a diplomat named *Du Sang* to force a pact with Silla in order to settle the border between Silla and Baekje. Silla used its suppression of the Baekje revival movement as a pretext for the movement not being quelled, but could not hold on any longer once the movement was quelled. In the eighth lunar month, 665 AD, Tang appointed Buyeo Yung as the governor of the Ungjin Commandery (熊津都督) and finally obtained King Munmu's agreement to a pact at Mt. Chwiri (就利山). By so doing, Tang strengthened its control over the land of Baekje.

### The Battle of Pyeongyang (平壤城) and the Fall of Goguryeo

Once Baekje had fallen, it was Goguryeo's turn to become the target. In 661, just one year after Baekje's collapse, Tang attacked Goguryeo by the sea route and besieged Pyeongyang. Previously, Tang had attacked from the direction of the Liao River (遼河). However, Tang's bold attempt to lay siege to Pyeongyang backfired when it found itself besieged by a Goguryeo counterattack, and it only narrowly escaped the crisis thanks to the food and other necessary supplies sent by Silla just in time to prevent a disaster. Emperor Taizong of Tang agreed with Kim Chunchu's plan to conquer Baekje first in order to get hold of Pyeongyang in the long term. Just as Kim had predicted, the collapse of Baekje produced many changes in Goguryeo's defense line.

Emperor Yang of Sui (隋煬帝) and Emperor Taizong of Tang (唐太宗) had failed in their previous expeditions to Goguryeo as the supply route from the Liao River to Pyeongyang was simply too long and difficult to manage. Now, however, the former Baekje territory and the land of Silla could be utilized as military supply stations. Tang's military expedition to Goguryeo became much easier with the support of Silla's military and supplies.

Goguryeo was caught in a pincer attack from both south and north and found itself in big trouble. Unintimidated by the prospect of undertaking winter military operations thanks to the supplies from Silla, Tang could safely alter its strategy to a war of attrition against Goguryeo.

In the middle of this dire situation, Yeon Gaesomun died in the tenth lunar month, AD 664. He was a very formidable leader of Goguryeo who had defeated Emperor Taizong of Tang, who had subsequently died after the failed military expedition. He was also a ruthless man who had murdered King Yeongnyu in a bloody coup and quickly risen to power. He could not trust anyone but his own family and relatives. His sons seized all the power Yeon Gaesomun had obtained. Yeon had worried about possible conflict between his sons but felt he had no options. After Yeon's death, bloody fights broke out among his power-hungry sons, just as he had predicted. Yeon Gaesomun's plea, in his final will, urging his sons to "unite like fish and water" proved of little avail, as the temptation of power got the better of them. Deprived of power by his younger brothers while out on an inspection, the eldest son Namsaeng betook himself to Gungnae (國內城) and surrendered to Tang with 10,000 households. By the ninth lunar month, AD 666, he had become a guide for the Tang expedition. The aftermath of this internal conflict led to yet another surrender: Yeon Jeongto, a brother of Yeon Gaesomun, submitted himself and twelve fortresses under his command to Silla in the tenth lunar month of that year. Possession of the twelve fortresses in Biyeolhol (比列忽, present-day Anbyeon in Hamgyeongnam-do) enabled the Silla-Tang alliance to attack Pyeongyang from the east.

No country could survive such a long period of warfare, conflicts between its ruling elite, and the betrayal of its leaders in such close succession. External enemies took advantage of the troubles inside. In the night lunar month, 667 Tang launched a full-scale attack and Sinseong in Yodong province capitulated. In 668, Pyeongyang was encircled by the Silla-Tang alliance advancing from Buyeoeseong, Biyeolhol, the Imjin River and many other places. In the ninth lunar month, 669, Goguryeo and its capital Pyeongyang collapsed, though other regional fortresses continued fighting. Inevitably there were movements for the resurrection of the country. The Goguryeo revival movement later became a key player in Silla's war against Tang.

Silla forces played a crucial role in the coalition forces' victory in the Battle of Pyeongyang. The most important battle that paved the way for

this victory was fought in Sacheon (蛇川), on the outer defense line of Goguryeo's capital. To break this line, the Biyeolju Regiment commanded by Kim Munyeong clashed with Goguryeo forces led by Taedaemangniji (太大莫離支) Nam Geon (男建) in the fields of Sacheon. While the accompanying Tang soldiers were frightened by the enemy forces and were unable to fight effectively, the Silla warriors valiantly confronted them. Bondeuk (本得), the Commandant (*Sogam*) of the Daedang (大幢) Camp, was instrumental in enabling his men to gain the upper hand, leading to Silla's victory. The Tang troops, who barely took part in the combat, stirred themselves into action only after the Silla forces had taken the advantage. Many generals, including Kim Sanggyeong, the Commandant of Hansanju, lost their lives in this battle. Sachan Guyul (求), a native of Asul (牙述), bravely crossed the stream Sacheon to penetrate the enemy positions and scored a major victory there. In spite of this gallantry, Guyul was reprimanded for having disobeyed the order and endangering himself and his troops by entering hostile territory. This enraged Guyul who attempted to hang himself out of indignation, but was saved in time by his troops. This anecdote is telling of the rigorous discipline enforced on the troops in Silla's army at that time.

By prevailing over Goguryeo in this battle, Silla obtained the single most important beachhead for attacking Pyeongyang. This victory was followed by another successful breakthrough into Goguryeo's line of defense, when Gugi (仇杞), a *gunsa* (army strategist) from Buyang (斧壤), routed the defense of Pyeongyang's South Bridge (Namgyo). Small fortified towns surrounding Pyeongyang also fell successively to Silla forces led by Sehwal (世活), a *gunsa* from Biyeolhol. With this, the outer defense line of Pyeongyang was completely wiped out. Shortly thereafter, the troops of Kim Dunsan, the Commander of Seodang (誓幢), destroyed the military camp outside Pyeongyang to tighten the siege of Goguryeo's capital city. By then, the tide of the war had turned overwhelmingly in favor of Silla. Finally, an assault was launched on Pyeongyang with Heugangnyeong (黑嶽令) Seongeuk (宣極) attacking its front gate and Bukgeo (北渠), the *gunsa* from Mt. Namhan, attacking its northern gate. Pyeongyang, long known as an impregnable fortified city, likened to an "iron-jar fortress" (*cheorongseong*), was at last brought to its knees by the stout-hearted Silla fighters. Bak Gyeonghan, the Commander of Hansanju, advanced into the city and slew the Pyeongyang Commander Sultal (述脫), further uplifting the spirit of the Silla troops.

As is made clear from the above account of the fall of Pyeongyang,

many natives of Silla's outer provinces fought alongside the central government forces, making major contributions to its final victory. What this signifies is that King Munmu was sagacious in the way he treated local gentry and that his inclusive policy toward them proved effective. This also suggests that there was already by then in Silla the open and tolerant social atmosphere needed for the success of the integration policy King Munmu later adopted toward the conquered people of former Baekje and Goguryeo territories. The fall of Pyeongyang, however, was not the end of the war, as various towns across Goguryeo still resisted the Tang forces. A restoration movement arose as well to revive Goguryeo. The restoration movement later became an important variable in the Silla-Tang War.

### War against Tang

With Goguryeo gone, Silla ought to have been victorious and jubilant, but it was not. In AD 663 Tang designated Silla as Gyerimju (鷄林州) and King Munmu as the Governor-general of Gyerimju (鷄林州大都督). Tang imposed on Silla the presumptuous state of subjugation. In 648 a secret agreement was made between Emperor Taizong of Tang and Kim Chunchu. But the new border, including Pyeongyang, did not appear to be guaranteed. On the contrary, it was now Silla's turn to fall.

In this regard, it is important to note the unusually high frequency with which Silla dispatched envoys to Japan during this period; twenty-five times between 668 and 700. Silla had to prepare for the possible breakout of war against Tang, and for any chance of an alliance between Tang and Japan. Tang was already a strong opponent, without the additional stronghold of the Baekje and Goguryeo territories. For Japan's part, it too was anxious about a possible attack by the Silla-Tang alliance. Japan greeted the envoys with cordial hospitality and sent gifts of silk and ships to King Munmu and Kim Yusin. Since AD 660 they had been enemies, but now they were friends again. Silla nurtured this new relationship, sending high-ranking envoys with generous gifts. Silla was very much prepared for the war against Tang, which although feared had been prepared for with precision.

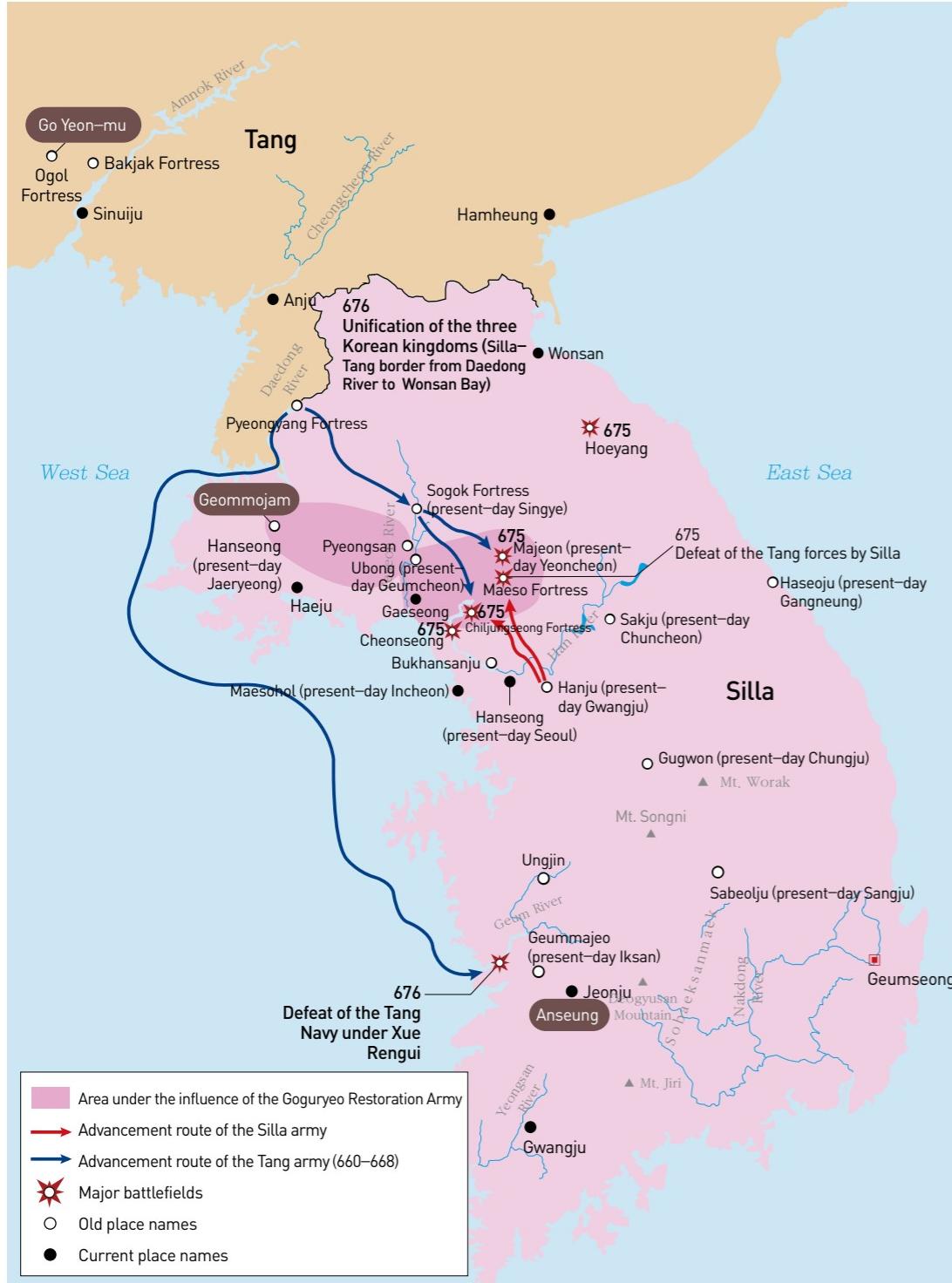
In 668 Tang declared Pyeongyang as Andongdohobu (安東都護府), assimilating it into her own territory. Diverging ideas about the former Baekje territory rose to the surface. Even before Goguryeo fell, Silla

advanced into Baekje's territory and persuaded the Goguryeo revival forces to fight against Tang. In the third lunar month, AD 670, the Silla General Seol Oyu (薛烏儒), together with Goguryeo Taedaehyeong (太大兄) Go Yeonmu (高延武), led an allied army of 20,000 men and attacked the cavalry of the Mohe (靺鞨) people, who were stationed at the vanguard of the Tang army in Ogolseong (烏骨城) on the other side of the Amnok River. Despite it being the obvious underdog, this time it was Silla who started the war, which would last for seven years. Concerning the question why Silla, an underdog in relation to the Tang state, chose to launch a pre-emptive attack on it, one must not forget international factors such as Turfan (present-day Tibet), which was also at war against the Chinese dynasty during that time.

### War against Tang and Victory

Tang had deployed its entire forces along the battle lines in Baekje and Goguryeo since AD 660, so Turfan seized its chance and suppressed the Toyuhun (土谷渾), a pro-Tang tribe, and took over the Silk Road. When the Turfan raided Tianshan South Road (天山南路), Tang's main force on the Korean Peninsula led by General Xue Rengui (薛仁貴) had to be redeployed to the battle at Toyuhun, which resulted in a serious weakening of Tang's presence in Liaodong and northern Korea, thus enabling Silla to advance as far as Ogolseong across the Amnok River by the third lunar month, 670. On top of that, General Xue Rengui's force of 100,000 troops was annihilated at the battle of Dafeichuan (大非川, present-day Qinghai Province [青海省 共和縣]), by Turfan forces, whereupon Silla immediately took over most of the former territory of Baekje. Tang then attempted to recover the territory with new troops but failed. In 672, Silla established the Soburiju (所夫里州) at Sabi, declaring who was in charge, and proceeded with the reorganization of its regional administration system.

Next, Tang targeted Ansi (安市城), the base of the Goguryeo revival forces, and stabilized Liaodong province in the seventh lunar month, 671. In the fourth lunar month, 672, the Turfan envoy arrived at Chang'an to meet Emperor Gaozong of Tang and Marquis Wu (武后) in a spirit of reconciliation. Relieved and realigned, Tang set up a military camp at Pyeongyang in the seventh lunar month, 672. Now Tang was ready to attack Silla with its full force. Marching northward, Silla clashed against Tang in the region



of Hwanghae-do (黃海道). At first Silla won a quick victory in the battle of Jaeryeong (載寧), but lost at the subsequent battle of Seongmun (石門, present-day Seoheung in Hwanghae-do). Tang's elite cavalry led by General Gao Kan (高侃) crushed most of the main body of Silla's army. It was such a devastating blow that Kim Yusin exiled his own son, Wonsul (元述), who had managed to survive the battle. In the twelfth lunar month, Tang took control of Mt. Baeksu from the people of Goguryeo and crushed the Silla troops who came to their rescue, forcing Silla to adopt a defensive strategy. Around the Imjin River region, both sides repeatedly advanced and retreated.

Tang continued launching its assaults until the twelfth lunar month, 673, when Turfan urged the tribes of West Turkistan to block the Tianshan North Road. As Tang had already lost the Tianshan South Road (天山南路) in 670, the North Road was an alternative route it could not afford to lose. It was therefore compelled to pour considerable resources into defending it. As a consequence, until the second lunar month, 675, there was a lull of fourteen months in the fighting between Tang and Silla.

The lull in war in 674 gave Silla valuable time to regroup and strengthen its diminished armed forces. Pro-Tang aristocrats were purged while former nobles from Baekje and Goguryeo were reinstated. One of the royals of the fallen kingdom of Goguryeo, An Seung (安勝), was designated as the King of Goguryeo, and Geummajeo (金馬渚; present-day Iksan in Jeollabuk-do) was allocated to the Goguryeo revival forces led by An Seung. To cope with the ferocious cavalry charges of Tang, a corps armed with long spears (jangchangdang, 長槍幢) and catapult units (*nodang*, 駕幢) were trained. At every strategic point fortresses were built and fortified.

In the first lunar month, 675 an envoy of Turfan traveled to Chang'an for peace talks, but the next month Tang reinvaded the Korean Peninsula. General Xue Rengui advanced south of the Imjin River, demolishing Chiljung Fortress (七重城) and occupying Maecho Fortress (買肖城, present-day Yangju in Gyeonggi-do). However, Silla did not just sit back and allow itself to be beaten. It smashed the Tang forces at Maecho Fortress in 675 and destroyed Tang's naval forces at Gibeolpo on the Geum River estuary, the following year. Silla had finally tasted victory.

Even after such a resounding defeat, Tang refused to accept that Silla had taken control of the region south of the Daedong River. Tang invited the exiled royals of Goguryeo and Baekje, granting them the titles of King of Goryeojoseon-gun and King of Baekjedaebang-gun respectively, with

the ulterior motive of reinvading Silla with the two kings as the titular heads of its armies. Emperor Gaozong of Tang actually attempted to invade the peninsula again in the ninth lunar month, 678, but was unable to achieve his objective due to the urgent situation with the Turfan.

In 678 some 180,000 Tang troops invaded Turfan in a campaign to recover four forts in the Anxi (安西) region it had ceded after the defeat at Defei River in 670. The campaign failed and Tang had to change its strategy against Turfan from an aggressive to a defensive one. It was said that Emperor Gaozong once muttered to himself, “Goguryeo cannot cross over the Liao River, and Baekje would never dare to cross the sea, but we exhaust ourselves on them every year. All should be left behind, and I regret that deeply.”

Silla prepared well for the war, but the unpredictable circumstances of the region also helped it a lot. The Silla-Tang conflicts were synchronized with Turfan-Tang battles. Silla made the most of the international situation and relied on diplomacy to bring about victory over Tang. Hindered by its war with Turfan, Tang was unable to subjugate Silla, not to mention the rest of the East Asian world. News of Tang’s defeat spread through the Gobi Desert, and the Gokturk in the north rose up to unite the nomads in 680. In 696 Li Jinzhong (李盡忠), a khan of the Khitan (契丹族) in Manchuria, rebelled against Tang at Yingzhou (營州, present-day Chaoyang, Liaoning) in Liaoxi (遼西) Province, whereupon the displaced people of Goguryeo seized the opportunity to establish a new kingdom named Balhae. Tang’s control over its neighboring countries had begun to falter.

### Historical Significance of the Silla-Tang War

For 300 years China was embroiled in civil wars and political chaos that were finally brought to an end by the Sui and Tang dynasties. Tang subjugated the nomadic peoples on the Mongolian Plateau one by one, including the East Gokturks in 630, the Tuyuhun Kingdom in 635 and Xueyantuo in 646. Tang’s influence was extended to many of the states of Turkestan in Central Asia after it defeated Gaochang in 640. Baekje and Goguryeo had not paid tribute to either Sui or Tang, but they capitulated in 660 and 668 respectively.

Most scholars take the view that East Asia was faced with a new unitary

world order in the seventh century. From the viewpoint of Sui and Tang, it was indeed their new order, whereas, from the neighboring states’ point of view, it was oppression and coercion. Many kingdoms and tribes had been crushed by military campaigns as the Sui and Tang Dynasties established the new order. Some resisted and rejected it, as in the cases of the Silla-Tang War and the Turfan-Tang War. Border states like Gokturk, Turfan, Uigur and Nan Chao in turn became strong enough to pose a threat to Tang. It was a time when the wheel of power was constantly turning.

The academic world has generally believed that there was some kind of order in ancient East Asia. Changes in international relations, however, have not been carefully observed due to a lack of interest in the surroundings. The world order of East Asia after the seventh century saw a balance between the center and the periphery, as in the fifth and sixth centuries. No doubt Silla contributed greatly to this order and balance. Silla united the three Korean kingdoms, repelled the mighty Tang, and promoted the foundation of the new kingdom of Balhae. The Silla-Tang War should be viewed alongside the Sui-Goguryeo and Tang-Goguryeo Wars in order to properly evaluate its impact on ancient East Asia. The unification of the Three Kingdoms should not be understood as only the fall of Baekje and Goguryeo. It kept the imperial ambitions of Sui and Tang at bay and established a new world order based on coexistence, without “big brother’s” domination of the East Asian region.

## 3

## System of Governance and Principles of the Middle Period

### Reflections on the Theory of Authoritarian Royal Power

Middle Silla is generally perceived as the heyday of the Silla Dynasty, a period in which it enjoyed political stability and cultural prosperity. Indeed, Middle Silla established the royal authority, stabilized the succession of King Muyeol's family line, and controlled the nobility. During that period the system of governance was reorganized and expanded to manage Silla's growing population and territory with the Jipsabu being placed at the center of administration to execute the king's commands. The centralized system of governance was completed by reorganizing the regions into nine *ju* (州, provinces), five *sogyeong* (小京, secondary capital), and numerous counties and prefectures (*gunhyeon*, 郡縣). Thanks to its secure and effective governance, the glorious Buddhist culture of Unified Silla was able to flourish, of which the Sacred Bell of Great King Seongdeok (Emile Bell), Bulguksa Temple, and Seokguram (Sakyamuni grotto) are outstanding examples.

As described above, the image of royal authority in Middle Silla has been considered so natural and familiar to us that it has been perceived as being beyond any doubt. Was this, however, really the way a nation should develop? Were the *jingol* really relentless exploiters while the kings were the guardians of the people? Silla's political arena has been somewhat simply

characterized as 'kingship versus subjecthood.' The consolidation of royal authority and centralization were taken for granted as being the right path for the nation to take.

Kim Chunchu had won the foreign wars but not the internal struggles. The state of Silla needed the cooperation of the *jingol* faction as much as it needed the king. Furthermore, arbitrary kingship could endanger the kingdom just as much as the arbitrary power of the nobles.

Unlike *Samguk sagi* (History of the Three Kingdoms), *Samguk yusa* (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms) states that Kim Chunchu and his descendants were the kings of Late Silla, rather than Middle Silla, thus showing an alternate view of the history of Silla. Silla was on the decline during the Late Period. If Kim Chunchu and his clan were regarded as rulers of the Late Period, this could mean that the Middle Period was not particularly an era of political stability and cultural prosperity as far as the people of Silla were concerned. Chungdamsa, a writer of *hyangga* (vernacular Korean poetry), wrote a famous native Silla song titled "Anming" (Song for the security of the people) for King Gyeongdeok (r. 742-765), which may actually have been a reference to the insecurity of the people, literally expressing wishes for the security of the people. This interpretation is becoming increasingly prevalent among scholars of Korean literature and language today.

How did the people of Silla perceive Middle Silla at that time? What did they see that we cannot see now? A relief cannot project all the aspects of an object. Only the elevated parts look distinctive, and their prominence arises due to contrast. To understand Middle Silla properly, one must look into the shadows as well as the well illuminated aspects of that period.

### The Kim Heumdal Revolt

After expelling Tang from the peninsula in 676, King Munmu tried to avoid further conflicts. Although the territory below the Daedong River was under Silla's control, it did not impose too much governance on the area north of the Han River. To revive its diplomatic relations with Tang, Silla sent envoys to deliver apologies, only to be rejected and threatened by Tang.

To make matters worse, Japan pillaged Silla to such an extent that King Munmu's last wish was to make his grave on a rock in the East Sea and to

become a dragon-guardian of Silla and Buddhism. Before the king died, he poured considerable effort into building Gameunsa Temple to pray for the annihilation of the Japanese invaders. After the war against Tang, Silla's international relations were extremely rocky.

Silla's internal affairs were the same: unstable and troublesome. During the Silla-Tang War King Munmu had purged many *jingol* aristocrats, accusing them of being rebels and/or pro-Tang traitors (*budangbae*, 付唐輩). Exploiting the national crisis, the king removed his opponents and paved the way for totalitarian governance and royal authority. Many were wrongly accused and those who survived lived in fear. The anger below the surface was palpable.

King Munmu died in 681 and, immediately after the enthronement of the new ruler, King Sinmun, the king's own father-in-law Kim Heumdal was beheaded for treason. Along with Kim Heumdal many aristocrats were also implicated and punished. In the case of the Minister of Defense (*Byongbureong*, 兵部令) Kim Gungwan and his son, suicide was the verdict for their 'crime' of not denouncing the acts of treason.

In a Royal Proclamation issued after the Kim Heumdal Revolt, King Sinmun lamented these unexpected betrayals and acts of treason during his mourning period, but the executions were too swift and organized to presume them to have been 'sudden and unexpected.' Rather, King Sinmun must have formulated an elaborate plan in a bid to eliminate any political opponents and thereby establish a more powerful absolute monarchy. The fact that the king killed his own father-in-law on a charge of treason demonstrates the severity of the collision between the king and the *jingol*. Traditionally, the Silla crown was assumed on an alternating basis by three clans, namely, Bak, Seok and Kim; there was no divine royal authority exclusive to one family. After King Beopheung, also known as Beopheung the Great, consolidated the royal sovereignty, the concept of *Seonggol* (聖骨), or the Sacred Bone lineage, was established as the sacred family destined to succeed to the throne. As shown by the abdication of King Jinji and the enthronement of kings from the Bak clan, no Silla kings could ignore the power of the assembly of the Daedeung (大等會議), the representatives of the *jingol* aristocrats.

## Centralization of Authority and Introduction of the Chancellor

Kim Chunchu had to think long and hard about the importance of strong kingship and the shift of power from the *jingol* to the king. As mentioned above, his pro-Tang policy was not solely a diplomatic strategy: its real purpose was to import Tang's developed systems, ideology, culture, rites and rituals in a drive to strengthen royal authority. Interestingly enough, since the reigns of Queens Seondeok and Jindeok, new posts such as Guksang (國相, Prime Minister) and Jaesang (宰相, Chancellor) had appeared. When Kim Chunchu visited Tang to meet Emperor Taizong, Kim's official title was Guksang.

Important decisions were made in the *Hwabaekhoeui*, the General Assembly of the Daedeung, which met at Namdang (South House), Jeongsadang (House of Political Affairs), and the four sacred Places of the Spirit. Until the first half of the sixth century resolutions were issued in the name of the king and members of the Assembly of the Daedeung. However, from the eighteenth year of the reign of King Beopheung (531), when the new post of Prime Minister (Sangdaedeung) was introduced, resolutions agreed at the Assembly were reported to the king by the Sangdaedeung, the head of the Assembly, and then promulgated in the form of a king's command upon the king's approval. The head of the Assembly changed from the Sangdaedeung to the Sangjaesang (上宰相, Chancellor) during the reign of King Taejong Muyeol.

The post of chancellor was imported from Tang, where the chancellor aided the emperor, supervised all government officials, and superintended all manner of state affairs. The Goryeo dynasty, following the initiative of the Silla dynasty, also adopted the chancellor system to run the country. The main role of the chancellor in Goryeo consisted in discussing, advising, proposing and making policies. The chancellor also assisted the king in finalizing the right decisions. The king of Silla appointed one Sangjaesang (Chief Chancellor), two Nambuksang (First and Second Chancellors), and several Samjaesang (Third Chancellors) from among the Sangdaedeung (上大等, Prime Minister), Byeongbureong (兵部令, Minister of Defense), Sijung (侍中, Chief Minister of the Chancellery Office), and Naeseongsasin (內省私臣 / 殿中令, Chief Officer for the Royal Family and Palace Management). The Chancellor system must have appeared during the reign of Queen Seondeok when Kim Chunchu reformed the political system to strengthen

the royal authority. In Unified Silla, the king, who held the power to appoint the chancellor and to make final decisions, must have wielded centralized political authority.

The king appointed a high-ranking nobleman of his choice as the chancellor to run the country efficiently. Middle Silla sought to balance power with this chancellor system, which differed significantly from that based on the Daedeung Assembly. It was the *jingol* who endorsed the Daedeung, while the king simply ratified their agreement afterwards. The Daedeung had everything to do with the succession based on ties of blood, while the Chancellor was the sole choice of the king.

### "Il tong Samhan"

#### (一統三韓, Unification of the Three Han) Consciousness and Embracing the Migrants of Goguryeo and Baekje

The people of Silla were very proud of having achieved the unification of the Three Kingdoms. A biography of Kim Yusin, written by one of his great-great-grandsons, Kim Jangcheong, records that when Kim Yusin was on his deathbed in 673, he told King Munmu that although the unification of the Three Kingdoms might not have brought a perfect reign of peace, the lull (*sogang* 小康) would allow the people to live prosperous stable lives. A stele built in the sixth year of the reign of King Sinmun (686), discovered in Cheongju, states proudly: "Silla unified the three Han states and expanded its territory" (合三韓而廣地).

Here, the 'three Han' referred to are not the historic entities known as Mahan (馬韓), Jinhan (辰韓), and Byeonhan (弁韓). Rather, they mean the three kingdoms of Silla, Goguryeo and Baekje. Some historical context can be provided to understand the changes. When Sui and Tang became eager to advance into the Far East, their interest in the Far East increased dramatically as well. The Chinese learned that the peoples of the three kingdoms had closely related historical backgrounds. Indeed, the Three Kingdoms could not be identified as separate ethnic groups. Chinese documents often referred to the Three Kingdoms' similar language, customs, culture and ancestry. In the eyes of the Chinese, the Three Kingdoms constituted a homogeneous national entity eligible for a common designation, i.e. Samhan (三韓) or Samguk (三國). In a letter sent by Emperor

Gaozong of Tang to King Uija of Baekje in 651, the Three Kingdoms over the Sea (Haedong Samguk 海東三國) were mentioned, as well as the Three Han (Samhan 三韓), providing clear evidence of this tendency.

In the beginning the three ancient states were separate countries. But as wars and political conflicts began to crowd the peninsula's history, the antagonism between them became increasingly acute. There was no sense of community or fellowship between them, only confrontation. All of this changed, however, in the late seventh century. The demise of Baekje and Goguryeo pushed the displaced people of these two kingdoms into Silla. When Tang tried to subjugate Silla after defeating Baekje and Goguryeo, Silla won the people of the three kingdoms over with a policy of inclusion and propaganda against their common enemy. The ploy succeeded, and the Tang threat worked to unite the three kingdoms into a de facto unified country.

In 660 King Taejong Muyeol appointed people of the fallen Baekje Kingdom to officials according to merit and without prejudice. King Munmu sustained his policy of non-discrimination toward the people of the fallen



Fig 5. Temple Monument of Uncheon-dong in Cheongju

kingdoms. In 670 King Munmu launched an assault against Ogor Fortress, Tang's frontline, with the Goguryeo revival forces; one good example of his non-discrimination policy. Another example can be seen in the victory of the allied forces of Silla and Goguryeo against Tang in 672, the twelfth year of the reign of King Munmu.

King Munmu dedicated the posthumous temple name of 'Taejong' to the late King Muyeol, making the founding father of Unified Silla the equal of Emperor Taizong of Tang by using the same Chinese characters (太宗). He raised one of the royals of the fallen kingdom of Goguryeo, An Seung (安勝), as the King of Goguryeo (高句麗王). He did all this with the aim of elevating Silla to the rank of a central country with neighboring states under its control. He also embraced the previously alienated *dupum* (頭品), or middle-class bureaucrats, establishing the Payroll Office (Sarokgwan, 司祿館) and a stipend system (*nokbongje*, 祿俸制) to grant financial security to lower-ranking bureaucrats.

Meanwhile, former nobles and regional forces of the fallen kingdoms were admitted to Silla's official ranks (*gwandeung*, 官等), where previously Silla had discriminated against the latter with regard to their employment. With wars having intensified, however, proactive participation and support were greatly needed. Regional forces and members of the diaspora who rendered distinguished services and contributions were rewarded with the ranks of capital office (*gyeongwi*, 京位), previously reserved for residents of the royal capital city only. The recipients were also allowed to reside in the royal capital city (*wanggyeong*, 王京). Finally, King Munmu eliminated the remote post (*oewi*, 外位) system and reformed the two-way employment system into a unitary one. Regardless of whether they originated from the diaspora or the regions, the people of Unified Silla were equally entitled to fill the posts of the capital office. The existing system was reformed again and previous privileges were lifted; everybody in the new Unified Silla was to be given equal opportunities under one royal sovereign, King Munmu.

Monks and other opinion leaders were treated with special favor. Regional rituals and religions, which could have become the center point of the people in the regions, were placed under the control of the central government. The reforms were carefully planned and executed in an orderly manner, with the clear intent of establishing the centralized authority of a unified nation.

## Establishment of the Confucian College and Reform of Central Bureaucratic Institutions

King Sinmun followed in his predecessors' footsteps in consolidating the royal authority, albeit in a more audacious manner. Upon his enthronement he executed his father-in-law, Kim Heumdol, for treason, announcing loudly and clearly that no aristocrats should dare to challenge the sovereign authority and that not even those closest to the king would be allowed to cross the line. Henceforth, his reform policies were directed toward fully consolidating the royal authority. It was King Sinmun himself who planned, implemented and completed the foundation of Unified Silla.

In the second year of his reign (682), he founded the National Confucian College (Gukhak, 國學) with the aim of educating, training and nurturing the elite and the bureaucracy. The college had been in preparation since the rule of Kim Chunchu, but was not institutionalized until the reign of King Sinmun. Serving as a career pathway for admission of members of the *dupum* class into the political arena, the college enabled the king to broaden the pool of the elite to support his sovereignty. The way was paved by Gangsu (强首) and Seolchong (薛聰), who belonged to the highest rank (*yukdupum*, 六頭品) of Silla's *dupum* class system. Seolchong compiled and organized *idu* (吏讀), a system for transcribing Chinese into Korean. He also added phonetic signs (*gugyeol*, 口訣) to the Nine Chinese Classics (*Gugyeong*, 九經) to make their content more easily accessible. Seolchong's work improved the use of administrative documents (*munseo haengjeong*, 文書行政) and expanded the base of education.

"Once upon a time there lived a flower king named Peony in a country of flowers. Peony loved the beautiful Rose, but impressed by the sincere advice of the ever faithful pasque flower, the king came to revere honesty and justice..."

Seolchong wrote this "Warning of the Flower King," an allegorical interpretation of King Sinmun's desire to leave the past comfort zone of the *jingol* aristocrats and be uplifted by the 'true beauty' of the real elite and an efficient system. Since the establishment of the National Confucian College, the *dupum* class had grown in political status as well as in their own minds.

Having united the three kingdoms, Silla was now in need of more neatly organized systems and organizations for its considerably enlarged population and expanded territory. King Sinmun systemized government offices so as

to manage people (*wibubu*, 位和府), resources, arts and crafts (*gongjangbu*, 工匠府), and building and construction (*yejakbu*, 例作府) more effectively, and institutionalized the central government to a degree comparable to that of China. By the fifth year of the reign of King Sinmun (685), each department was equipped with civil officials (*saji*, 舍知) responsible for dealing with the practical business of administration. King Munmu had already installed civil officials (*sa*, 史) at the forefront of government administration. Now, he completed the five-rank administrative system comprising *Yeong* (令), *Gyeong* (卿), *Daesa* (大舍), *Saji* (舍知) and *Sa* (史). Civil servants below the rank of *Daesa* were appointed from members of the *dupum* who had been educated, trained and developed at the National Confucian College.

### Nine Provinces (*Ju*) and Five Secondary Capital Cities (*Sogyeong*) and World View of Silla

With Baekje and Goguryeo fully absorbed into her territory, Silla reorganized the land into *ju* (州, provinces), *gun* (郡, counties) and *hyeon* (縣, prefectures). A *ju* was a preliminary unit for regions that had been expanded during the military campaign, but it was reformed into an administrative unit for a large area after the settlement of the unification process. Following the incorporation of Wansanju (完山州, present-day Jeonju in Jeollabuk-do) and Cheongju (菁州, present-day Jinju in Gyeongsangnam-do) into Silla's territory in the fifth year of the reign of King Sinmun, Silla arranged its territory into nine provinces (*ju*) in 685.

One problem was that the newly extended border, which stretched as far as the Sobaek Mountain Range and the Han River, eventually pushed the royal capital city (*wanggyeong*, 王京) to the southeastern tip of the country. To compensate for this during the reign of King Jijeung, *sogyeong* (小京, secondary capital cities) were established to rule the larger country more effectively. Several *sogyeong* had already been activated: Geumgwan *sogyeong* (金官小京) in present-day Gimhae, Gyeongsangnam-do, Bugwon *sogyeong* (北原小京) in present-day Wonju, Gangwon-do, and Jungwon *sogyeong* (中原小京) in present-day Chungju, Chungcheongbuk-do. As well as these three *sogyeong*, two more *sogyeong* were added in the fifth year of King Sinmun's reign: Seowon *sogyeong* (西原小京) in present-day Cheongju, Chungcheongbuk-do and Namwon *sogyeong* (南原小京) in

present-day Namwon in Jeollabuk-do. Among those relocated to the five newly established secondary capital cities were Silla aristocrats and nobles from subjugated countries including Baekje, Goguryeo and Gaya. These nobles were assigned key missions in the political and cultural activities of the regions as the new unified nation took shape.

The establishment of the nine *ju* (provinces) was inspired by the fact that



Fig 6. Nine provinces and five secondary capitals

King Wu (禹), who created the first Chinese dynasty of Zhou, had divided his country into nine *zhou*. Such an administrative division, certainly a reflection of the belief in the oneness of the peoples of the Three Kingdoms, also offers a glimpse into the world view of the Silla people, along with the view of ‘one nation, three countries’ (*Iltong Samhan*, 一統三韓). King Sinmun divided the nine *ju* into three clusters of three *ju* to show that Silla’s single-handed unification of three countries had led to the establishment of one great unified nation. Most of Goguryeo’s former territory was not included in the nine *ju* of Unified Silla. This was compensated for by the enthronement of a member of the Goguryeo royal family An Seung as the King of Goguryeo and the allocation of Geummajeo of Iksan to him, thus showing off the new Silla as the suzerain of a sovereign Princely State.

One particular episode shows how Silla took pride in its feat of unification. When scorned by Wu Zetian (則天武后) for using the same temple name as Emperor Taizong (太宗文皇帝) for King Muyeol in 692, the twelfth year of King Sinmun’s reign, King Sinmun simply and flatly refused the Tang’s impudent demand for immediate correction of this name. He replied that the late king had been a very great king (*taejong*, 太宗) who had built the great nation of Silla by unifying the three kingdoms (*iltong Samhan*, 一統三韓) and hence fully deserved the title.

From generation to generation, the Silla royal family’s reverence for and pride in King Taejong Muyeol never wavered. King Gyeongmun (r. 861–875) praised King Taejong Muyeol once again. In his letter of ratification for the chief monk of Wolwang Temple at Mt. Worak, he mentioned that the king had conquered the Three Kingdoms and built one great nation to ease the distress of the people of the Three Kingdoms. King Taejong Muyeol and King Munmu were granted eternal posts at the royal shrine of Silla to commemorate their achievements and services in their pursuit of unification.

King Sinmun reorganized the central army corps of Silla by incorporating the displaced forces of Baekje, Goguryeo, Mohe, and the people of Bodeokguk, namely, An Seung’s Goguryeo, thereby completing Silla’s nine central military organizations. Out of nine corps, Silla forces accounted for only three, while three Goguryeo forces, two Baekje forces and one Mohe force made up the rest. The ruler of Middle Silla included people from Goguryeo/Bodeok (高句麗/報德國) and Mohe (肅慎) in the team of envoys dispatched to Japan to boast about Silla’s dominion over those states and the fact that so many different ‘ethnic’ groups had been assimilated into one

great Silla. In an ode addressed by King Sinmum to the Five Shrines in 687, he proudly emphasized: “Envoys from far-away lands come and offer rare and precious gifts.”

## Silla Village Documents and Local Governance

The so-called ‘Village Documents’ (*Silla chollak munseo*, 新羅村落文書), also referred to as the ‘Civil Administration Documents’ (*Minjeong munseo*, 民政文書) or ‘Census Register’ (*Jangjeok*, 帳籍), are the documents which reported the economic status of a number of villages and included a census of households for the purposes of taxation and governance. The extant documents are reports on four villages near Seowon *sogyeong* written in 695, the fourth year of the reign of King Hyoso. They are the best source for understanding how Silla’s provinces were ruled. They were discovered in 1933 at the Shosoin (正倉院) of Todai Temple (東大寺) in Japan.

The documents detailed the names of each county and village, the size of the villages, the numbers of households, horses, cows and trees, and the land area of the farmland. In the case of trees, the numbers were categorized by species, and included mulberry, nut pine, and walnut trees among others. This categorization was used for the efficient collection of taxes. The ‘Village Documents’ were revised every three years, and updated with the details of any natural disasters or/and changes in the households. In short, the central government of Silla seemed to wield powerful command over the inhabitants of villages.

Ordinary farmers who formed the basis of the social hierarchy lived in villages, clusters of which formed a county. A village chief (*chonju*, 村主) usually represented several villages. The central government sent a regional officer to each county to collect taxes and recruit corvée labor with the aid of the village chief. Regional officers paid extra attention to those who evaded taxes. Villagers had to report in person to the authority whenever and wherever they changed their residence, which resulted in confining villagers to their native villages.

According to the ‘Village Documents,’ the four villages comprised 43 households and 442 inhabitants, including 194 men, 248 women, and 25 slaves. Villagers were categorized by age, social class, and tax grade as follows: elderly persons (*no*, 老), tax exempt (*je*, 免), full taxpayers (*jeong*, 丁),

young people who could be of help to the taxpayer (*jo*, 助), boys (*chu*, 違), and children (*so*, 小). The four villages also raised 61 horses, 53 cows, and 4,249 mulberry trees, which suggests they were quite well off compared to ordinary villages of the late Joseon dynasty. It is also possible that these villages featured in the documents because they were a source of income for the royal family.

Changes in the tax system can also be detected in the ‘Village Documents’: Silla divided households into nine categories according to their assets, and levied the tax based on the nine-category system (*bodeungje*,

戶等制). The tax system must have been put into practice by King Taejong Muyeol, who introduced the Order of the Ministry of Justice known as Ibangbugyeok (理方府格). Amid the wars and conflicts that led to the unification of the three kingdoms, social stratification was exacerbated, the farming sector collapsed, and the nation’s tax revenues became unstable. To prevent further failures among farmers and to stabilize the nation’s revenues, King Taejong Muyeol introduced the concept of tax based on the individual taxpayer’s assets, where previously a poll tax had been levied. The ‘Village Documents’ covered the population in greater detail than they did the land, and statistics on age were treated as important information. Therefore, at least at the time of reporting, the number of people (*jeong*, 丁) required to pay full tax was regarded as the most important asset, over and above land or any other matter.

The village chief was granted a tax-free field (*chonju widap*, 村主位畠) for his services in the areas of governance and administration. Regional offices were given a field (*gwammodap*, 官謨畠) to manage and regional officers a salary (*naesiryeyeongdap*, 內視令畠), and such fields were cultivated by farmers under the supervision of the village chief. The farmers paid their rent in the form of produce from the fields to the regional office and its officers. In those days, all the land basically belonged to the king (*wangto sasang*, 王土思想), and was called *Yeonsuyudap* (烟受有畠), meaning farmers’ land given by the nation. In practice, however, individual ownership was acknowledged and sale of property was possible.

### Wooden Slips and Transportation of Tax-related Wooden Tags

In ancient society, taxes were paid in kind. The local offices made wooden tags (*bachal*, 荷札) on which were inscribed the taxpayer’s place of residence, name, and amount of tax payable. Wooden tablets were the most common medium for the written word before paper entered into widespread use in East Asia. As the collected taxes had to be transported a long way to the central office, the tags had to be durable, hence these wooden tags were widely used. Each tag contained either a hole in its upper part or a ‘V’ shaped groove cut into both shoulders to which a string could be attached. Sometimes the lower part of the tag was sharpened so it could be pinned to tax products.



Fig 7. Administrative documents of Silla in the Shosoin collection in Japan

Some 500 or more tags made in 560 were found at Seongsan Mountain Fortress (城山山城) in Haman, Gyeongsangnam-do. Each tag contains the taxpayer's place of residence, name, and amount of tax paid. It would have been impossible to include such details unless the administration had made a census report and kept records of every taxpayer. These tags were produced about 130 years before the 'Village Documents' (695), thus proving that Silla was already collecting taxes with full knowledge of the inhabitants of the villages at that time. The wooden tags excavated from Anapji, an artificial lake in Gyeongju, also show that the tax collection system was maintained after the unification of the Three Kingdoms.

The Central Administrative Bureau compiled village documents and statistics on individual households and their economic status, and analyzed the economic capacity of each regional unit. Based on these data, taxes were levied and labor assigned in each region, thus enabling the nation to raise income. The village chief recorded the details of taxes on the wooden tags and, along with local officers, dispatched the collected taxes to the central office. The central office checked the individual wooden tags upon their arrival, with the village documents ready to hand.

### The Limits of the Governance System of Middle Silla

Once the regional administration system and tax matters had been fixed, King Sinmun dared to carry out further reforms in the ninth year of his reign. Before 689 AD, bureaucrats were paid with land; now, the king wanted to abolish that system and replace it with a salary to be paid in the form of grain on an annual basis. In fact, King Munmu had already instructed the central office to collect taxes directly from the people and to pay the salary of government employees. As that aspect of centralization was not yet applicable to all, applying only to the *dupum* class at that time, King Sinmun made it applicable to all government officers. As the aristocrats were able to collect taxes directly from the land given to them, their power and influence were untouchable in that region. If that right was now to be transferred to the central government, it would have to be coupled with the necessary powers. This measure was perhaps King Sinmun's most powerful blow against the *jingol*.

In the year of these tax reforms, King Sinmun attempted to relocate the

capital city to Dalgubeol (present-day Daegu), but failed in the face of stiff opposition from the *jingol*. The capital city was the symbolic center of all power, privilege, and institutions. King Sinmun wanted to push through changes, including the creation of a new capital for the new Unified Silla Dynasty, but he ultimately failed in this, exposing the limits of Middle Silla royal authority in the process.

Centralized power marked the culmination of King Sinmun's reign. The king exercised absolute power based on the newly reformed systems, which were not sustained by the new bureaucratic elite but by the long-established aristocracy. Among the powerful elite Kim Chunchu's son, son-in-law, and grandsons were the most formidable: they dominated the post of chancellor and played some highly exclusive power games. Even Kim



Fig 8. Wooden slips of Seongsansanseong Fortress in Haman

Yusin's grandson had already been knocked off the power ladder during the reign of King Seongdeok. The advancement of the *dupum* was still in the hands of the *jingol*.

The Middle Silla royal family rushed headlong into a bloody purge and inadvertently narrowed their group of supporters. Brilliant though they were, King Sinmun and King Munmu had very few people to rely upon. A couple of close kindred of the king were put in the vanguard of the reformation. Silla society had been very closed, with the *jingol* monopolizing all the power, yet the Middle Silla Period of reinforced royal authority seemed more closed still. The political arena became unstable and *jingol* rebellions broke out incessantly.

How, then, was Middle Silla able to survive for another eighty years after the death of King Sinmun? In fact, the simple answer is that this was largely attributable to an increase in income. The unification of the Three Kingdoms had increased tax revenues by 150 percent, while expenditure on military campaigns had dropped to almost zero. The country's finances were now healthier than ever. Middle Silla was sustained not by strong royal authority. The members of the royal family who occupied the position of the chancellor one after another were not helping at all. It was Middle Silla's economic wealth that satisfied the *jingol*, who had suddenly found themselves deprived of the power they had enjoyed for so long. The aristocrats could not collect taxes from the land, as land was not given directly to them. But their annual salary was much more than the amount they had collected from the farmers previously. And it was easier and much more convenient! The manors of the aristocrats were filled with gold, hence their name 'Houses of Gold' (*Geumiptaek* 金入宅).

But what if their generous salaries had suddenly disappeared? What if the country could no longer afford regular payment? What if the finances of the central government shrank? It was only a matter of time before the *jingol* would feel the need to rebel again. Such concerns quickly became a reality. In 767, seventy years after the abolition of the *nogeupje* (祿邑制), King Gyeongdeok was compelled to reintroduce the old system and give the land back to the aristocrats.

# 4

## The Flowering of Non-Zen Buddhism and the Ripening of Culture

### Buddhist Policy in the Middle Period

In the Silla society of the Middle Period, Buddhism's role as a political ideology diminished somewhat, as its role as a religion and a source of solace for the masses became more important. In the Middle Ancient Period, Buddhism was mostly a state religion. But, after the unification of the Three Kingdoms, under the influence of advances in the Buddhist scholarship and doctrines of Baekje and Goguryeo, Silla Buddhism gave rise to richly diverse systems of thought.

In the Middle Ancient Period, when state systems were still being put into place in Silla, the sacredness that Buddhism lent to monarchy, through ideals and notions like Chakravartin or the 'true lineage,' played a crucial role in strengthening the authority of the king. However, as challenges from Baekje and Goguryeo continued, and Silla's society was faced with persistent political unrest, highlighted by the Rebellion of Bidam in protest against a queen's ascension to the throne, there was a realization that Buddhism alone was insufficient to ensure or guarantee support for the monarch from the aristocrats and the people at large.

Accordingly, Middle-period rulers after King Muyeol looked to anchor the legitimacy of their regime no longer in the sacredness conferred by Buddhism, but in Confucian values. In other words, what was emphasized



Fig 9. General view of the Gameunsa Temple site in Gyeongju



Fig 10. General view of the King Munmu's Underwater Tomb (Daewangam) in Gyeongju

was the moral integrity of the ruler, his benevolence toward his people and virtuous rule. Silla rulers of this period also implemented policies and reforms that reflected such values. King Munmu who on his deathbed expressed the wish to become reborn as a dragon to defend Silla and its people in spite of the advice against it by a monk, who told him that “a dragon is an insignificant creature not suitable for a king,” is a fine example

of a Confucian ruler as a sovereign who values practical benefits for his people above all else.

In 664, to prevent the concentration of wealth and resources in temples at the expense of the Silla people at large, King Munmu imposed restrictions on donations of money and land to Buddhist temples. In 669, he established the Jeonggwan, a government agency in charge of regulating the affairs of the various schools and orders of Buddhism, while also setting up administrative offices in major temples. In this way, the administration of religious and temple affairs was absorbed into the government’s administrative system. In departure from the practice in the Middle Ancient Period, in which Buddhist orders and temples were largely autonomous, starting in the Middle Period, they became regulated by the government.

Confucian principles were thus more valorized by Middle-period rulers than Buddhism. However, this does not mean that they kept their distance from Buddhism or that Buddhist temples’ role as the votive venues for the welfare of the nation diminished or were ignored in any manner. King Munmu, for instance, requested a Buddhist funeral for himself after his passing. As a matter of fact, King Munmu was cremated following the Buddhist custom, and this was the first-ever recorded cremation in Silla. In addition, numerous Buddhist temples were built by the royal family during the Middle Period in various parts of the capital city to pray for the peace of the souls of deceased kings.

Moreover, during the early part of the Middle Period, when there was considerable anxiety and unease in Silla society, as well as political instability caused by the unification wars and the war with Tang the royal family was deeply immersed in esoteric Buddhism, with occult rituals being held in the palace. In 679, King Munmu ordered Myeongnang, a monk of esoteric Buddhism, to construct Sacheonwang Temple as a way of imploring Buddha to help defeat Tang forces. He also ordered Gameun Temple to be built near his future burial site at Daewangam for the purpose of safeguarding Silla. This temple was, besides, the setting for the legend of Manpasikjeok, a miraculous flute that gave warning of any impending danger to the country. King Sinmun also had a temple, subsequently known as Bongseongsa, built at the suggestion of an esoteric monk named Hyetong.

Myeongnang and Hyetong, both of whom had studied in Tang China, introduced new types of rituals that were less abstract and had a more

popular appeal than traditional esoteric Buddhist rites which consisted mainly of chanting. These rituals were held, for example, in front of visual representations of countless Heavenly Kings, Kings of Supernatural Power, and Dragon Kings, who were tasked with safeguarding Silla. Sacheonwangsa (Temple of the Four Heavenly Kings) had two wooden pagodas on its grounds, with hyper-realistic bas-reliefs of members of the Four Heavenly Kings' retinue such as Divine Generals and Yaksha carved by the craftsman Yangji on their base level. Sacheonwangsa was an eponymous temple of the Middle Period, built as a way of healing and appeasing the anguished society of Silla against the backdrop of on-going wars, through the cult of the Four Heavenly Kings.

In 684, King Sinmun ordered that temple administrative offices, or *Seongjeon*, to be set up in Sacheonwangsa and other various temples including Bongseongsa, Gameunsa, Yeongmyosa and Hwangboksa. *Seongjeon* were government offices in charge of managing temples as well as providing funding for them. Temples with a *seongjeon*, known as *seongjeon* temples, most often were so-called national defense temples, in which prayers for deceased members of the royal family were held. Generous funding by the royal family helped make these temples the nation's most eminent and prosperous centers for Buddhism.

The royal family also sponsored the construction of gigantic structures in *seongjeon* temples as a way of praying for the souls of past kings. In homage to her husband after his passing, Lady Sinmok, the queen consort to King Sinmun, sponsored the construction of the three-story pagoda on the grounds of Hwangboksa. After the death of Queen Consort Sinmok and King Hyoso, King Seongdeok consecrated the Great Dharani Sutra inside the pagoda of Hwangboksa in their memories. This became a precedent that was widely followed thereafter, making the *Great Dharani Sutra* the scripture of choice to be placed inside a pagoda niche. As for King Gyeongdeok, he planned a twenty-ton bronze bell, later to be known as the 'Sacred Bell of King Seongdeok' (or Emile Bell), in memory of his predecessor, King Seongdeok, but this project met with multiple setbacks. King Gyeongdeok never saw the beleaguered project to its end in his lifetime, with the bell only being completed later during King Hyegong's reign.

During the Middle Period, Buddhist temples were also built outside the capital area. In 676, the monk Uisang who had recently returned from Tang China constructed Buseok Temple in Mt. Taebaek in Yeongju as the

base for Huayan Buddhism that he was to spread in Silla, with funding from the royal government. In 683, the king relocated the administrative seat of Guljeong-hyeon (present-day Yangsan, Gyeongsangnam-do) at the suggestion of his minister Chungwon, and ordered Yeongchwi Temple to be built on the former site of the government building.

### Popularization of Buddhism and the Spread of the Amitabha Pure Land Cult

While the political influence of Buddhism waned in the Middle Period, its base of believers broadened, especially among commoners, with faith-based activities also sharply increasing. During the Middle Ancient Period, the *Sutra on the Divination of the Effect of Good and Evil Actions* (K. *Jeomchalgyeong*; C. *Zhanchajing*) and the Amitabha Sutra, introduced by the monks Wongwang and Jajang, served as a basis for the popularization of Buddhism among the masses. This trend further accelerated following the unification of the Three Kingdoms. Even those inhabitants of the royal capital who belonged to the bottom echelons of the social hierarchy increasingly joined the Buddhist faith. This is in sharp contrast to Buddhism in the Middle Ancient Period, whose main base of followers was made up of members of the royal family and aristocrats. Around the time of the unification, there was the so-called Street Buddhism (*Yeohang Bulgyo*) movement in which monks toured marketplaces and villages across the country to explain Buddha's teachings in simple and easy-to-understand terms and carried out their missionary work by reaching out to the populace in their own environment.

Hyesuk, who was a monk esteemed enough to attempt an academic stay in China, in 600, along with Anhong, nevertheless lived in the countryside, away from mundane recognition in the capital, to devote himself to Buddhism amongst the lowly peasants. Hyesuk is famously remembered for making a Gukseon (a *Hwarang* leader) who was engrossed in hunting realize how sinful it is to kill sentient beings by offering him the flesh cut out from his own thigh. He declined the king's invitation to the capital, preferring to dedicate his life to spreading Buddhism among ordinary people. There were also monks like Hyegong who were originally servants working for a nobleman's household before they entered the priesthood

and eventually earned esteem for their Buddhist scholarship. After he became a monk, Hyegong is said to have resided in a small temple and converted people in the street to Buddhism by singing and dancing while wearing a basket on his head; thus never trying to shed his humble origin and showing a fondness for simple folk. Daean was another monk who preferred the company of humble people. Although renowned for his Buddhist scholarship, Daean is said to have declined the king's invitations to join the fashionable life in the capital and pretended to be mad, spending much of his time in the streets mixing with the ordinary people.

Wonhyo was arguably the most shining example of a Silla monk who sought to bring people of all walks of life into Buddhism. Though he was an eminent monk who singlehandedly raised Buddhist scholarship in Silla to a new height, he did not hesitate to lower himself to the level of uneducated people to be able to deliver Buddha's teaching to them. Calling himself Soseong geosa, Wonhyo toured villages, singing and dancing, to reach people through a language they could understand. The Pure Land cult, for example, became widespread in Silla through Wonhyo's missions. This cult espoused the view that all sentient beings can be reborn in the Pure Land of Amitabha, the Buddhist paradise, through prayer. People praised Wonhyo, saying, "Humble folks have been brought into religious life, and eight or nine out of ten people now chant the prayer of Amitabha," thanks to him.

Around the time of the unification of the Three Kingdoms, the Amitabha cult penetrated all levels of Silla society, as evidenced by stories recounting how a slave was reborn in the Pure Land. Statues of Amitabha were also erected in great numbers across the country. The popularity of the Amitabha cult owed in great part to the notion that anyone can be reborn in the Western Paradise, presided over by the Buddha Amitabha, through simple prayers, a belief which easily gained acceptance among the ordinary people. The Gwanseeum (Avalokitesvara) cult was also widespread, as this Bodhisattva of compassion who perceives the suffering of sentient beings had a popular appeal that spoke to the hearts of common folk. As a result, the Lotus Sutra was read by many in Silla. The popularity of the Gwanseeum cult is well attested to by the *hyangga* song that relates how a mother helped her blind child to regain his sight by praying to the Thousand-hand Avalokiteśvara statue in Bunhwang Temple.

## Woncheuk and Consciousness-only Buddhism

Around the time of the unification, to deepen their knowledge of Buddhism, Silla monks traveled not just to China, but also to far-away India. Two Silla monks, Ariyabalma and Hyeeop, studied Buddhist scriptures in Mahabodhi and Maranatha Temples in Bodh Gaya, in India. However, they never made their way back to Silla, remaining in India until their death. During

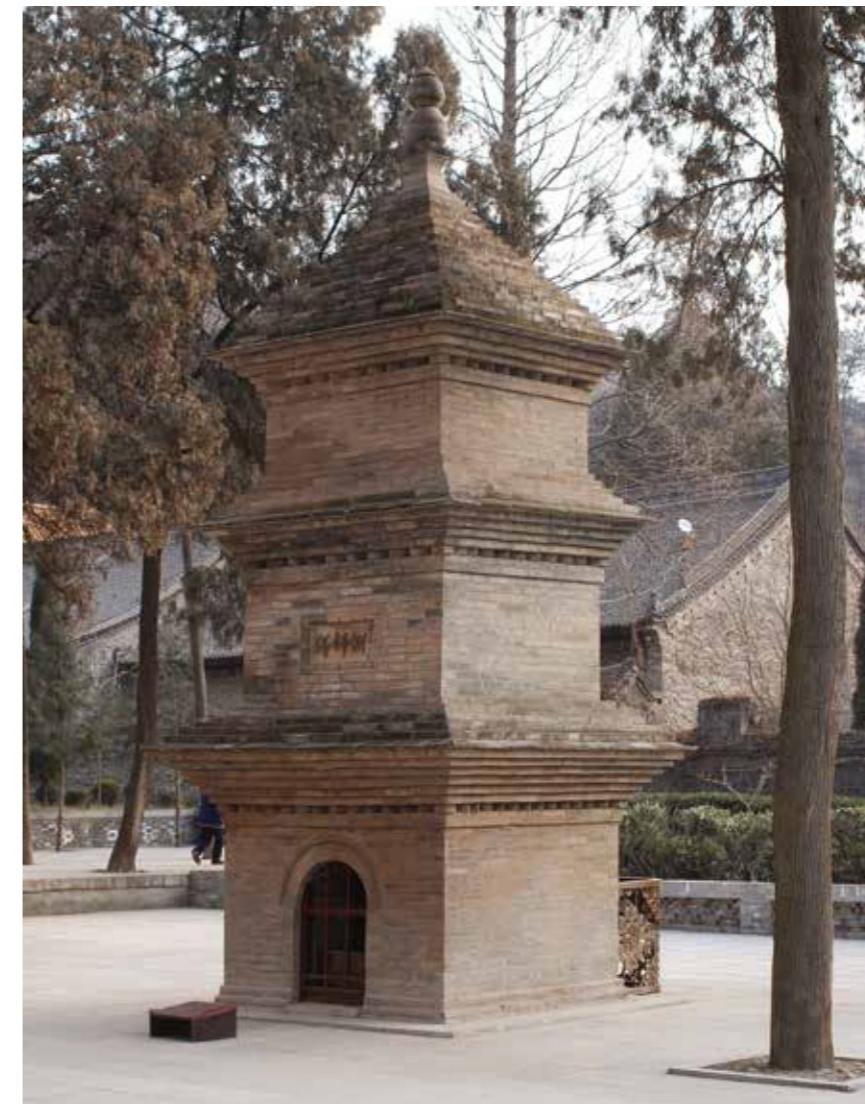


Fig 11. Woncheuktap Pagoda of Seomyeongsa Temple in Xian, China

King Seongdeok's reign, Hyecho traveled to India and the western regions beyond India by way of China, visiting various sacred sites of Buddhism. He wrote down his experiences from this journey in his *Wang ocheonchukguk jeon* (Memoir of a pilgrimage to the Five Kingdoms of India). Ariyalma, Hyeeop and Hyecho are only a few of the examples of Silla monks who journeyed overseas in their quest for enlightenment during this period noted for international travels by Buddhist clergy.

The traveling monks brought home with them the knowledge of various Chinese and Indian Buddhist doctrines. The study of these new doctrines helped enrich and diversify Buddhist thinking in Silla, ushering in the heyday of Korean Buddhist scholarship. Monks like Woncheuk, Uisang and Wonhyo, who developed their own systems of thought, tremendously influenced Buddhist thinking not just in Silla, but also in China and Japan, laying the groundwork for the advancement of East Asian Buddhism. Of these three, Woncheuk (613–696), whose doctrine expanded on Consciousness-only (*Yogācāra*) Buddhism, a Chinese school of Buddhism, was the first to leave his mark.

In East Asian Buddhism, the notion of Tathagatagarbha (*Yeoraejang*) which is the belief in the innate potential of Buddhahood in all people was widely accepted. Tathāgatagarbha was also a concept that was embraced by the Shelun School of Consciousness-only Buddhism which was popular in China at that time. However, this conceptual marriage was proved to be problematic by Hyeonjang (600–664) who returned to Silla in 645 after studying Consciousness-only Buddhism in India. Hyeonjang pointed out that as consciousness-only Buddhism was a study of the mind and that true reality eludes human beings due to false constructions of the mind dictating their perception, it was never to be confused with Tathāgatagarbha, at least in India. He, therefore, argued that the doctrine of the Dilun School, which predated that of the Shelun School, was sounder than that of the latter, insofar as it clearly distinguished Cittamatra (consciousness-only) from Tathāgatagarbha.

As for Woncheuk, he was well versed in the doctrine of the Shelun School, as he had been to China at a tender age to study Buddhist philosophy. When he was brought to realize the errors in the Old Yogācāra doctrine thanks to Hyeonjang, Woncheuk was adaptable enough to go ahead and teach himself the New Yogācāra doctrine. Woncheuk was also proficient in Sanskrit and other Indian languages and various languages of

the western regions beyond India and played a key role in Hyeonjang's scripture translation project. The translation of Buddhist scriptures he brought from India left Hyeonjang little time to devote to writing explanations about the New Yogācāra doctrine. It was instead Woncheuk who systematized the New Yogācāra doctrine by adding annotations to the Yogācāra scriptures translated by Hyeonjang. Because of this, he attracted resentment from Gyugi and other disciples of Hyeonjang who were introduced to the New Yogācāra doctrine by the latter. They maligned him, accusing him of stealing Hyeonjang's philosophy. However, benefiting from the strong support of the Tang emperor, he was appointed head monk of Ximing Temple in Chang'an (Xi'an) in 658. This helped him to found his own school of thought, known as the Seomyeong School, which grew no less eminent than the Jaeun School, founded by Gyugi, and to build a solid legacy as a Yogācāra scholar and thinker.

Woncheuk's initial encounter with Consciousness-only Buddhism was through the Old Yogācāra doctrine which had a pronounced Madhyamaka (K. *Junggwan*) leaning. Due to this background, Woncheuk had a much more inclusive stance than Hyeonjang did under the New Yogācāra framework and tried to reconcile the dichotomy of *gong* (emptiness: *sunya*) and *yu* (being: *bhava*). Woncheuk's consciousness-only Buddhism was one that added elements of the New Yogācāra School to the basic framework of the Old Yogācāra doctrine. His consciousness-only philosophy was later known in Silla through his disciple Dojeung, who returned from Tang in 692.

Taehyeon, a disciple of Dojeung, wrote many books on subjects related to Consciousness-only Buddhism, including *Seongyusingnon hakgi*, a study on *Cheng weishi lun* (Treatise on establishing Consciousness-only) and forged an original and distinctive Consciousness-only philosophy by blending Woncheuk's theory with the doctrine of Gyugi, the spiritual heir of Hyeonjang, and elements of Huayan philosophy. Wonhyo also argued for the need to transcend the differences between Tathāgatagarbha and Yogācāra, demonstrating in his book *Panbiryangnon* that the former was the same as the concept of '*biryang*' (*anumana pramana*: inferential cognition) in the Yogācāra framework. He further pointed out how much of the debate between the proponents of the notions *gong* and *yu* relied on sophistry and fallacious arguments, rather than on a real difference in concepts. Wonhyo tried to integrate elements from the various treatises translated by Hyeonjang into the traditional Consciousness-only framework.

In other words, Wonhyo attempted to embrace the New Yogācāra doctrine from the point of view of the Old Yogācāra School.

## Uisang and the Flowering of Huayan Buddhism

Just as prominent as the Consciousness-only doctrine was the Huayan philosophy in Silla Buddhism of the Middle Period. The Huayan doctrine drew on the content of the Avatamsaka Sutra and emphasized the interconnections existing between all beings. The basic framework of this Buddhist philosophy was built by Zhiyan (602–668) of the early Tang Dynasty. The Huayan doctrine was opposed to the New Yogācāra doctrine which rejected the notion of Tathāgatagarbha, and attempted to explain the oneness of Buddha and sentient beings through the concept of '*beopgyeyeongi*' (*fajie yuanqilun*: interdependent co-arising of the Dharma Realm). As a home-grown system of Buddhist thought, the Huayan philosophy signaled the birth of China's own Buddhist scholarship.

In Silla, the Huayan doctrine was introduced by Uisang (625–702) who studied under Zhiyan and returned from China in 661 (1st year of King Munmu's reign). Uisang was of aristocratic extraction, being born to a *jingol* family. After his return, he initially took up residence in Hwangbok Temple, but before long, he moved to Mt. Taebaek with his disciples and founded Buseoksa, where he held lectures on Huayan Buddhism. The Huayan philosophy of Uisang is well summarized in his *Hvaeom ilseung beopgye yeongido* (Chart of the Dharma World of the Single Vehicle of the Huayan), a hymn that he composed.

This poem consisting of thirty lines, each containing seven words, is arranged like a chart in which it progresses in a rotating motion from left to right, and top to bottom. The characters in black ink symbolize sentient beings, the red lines drawn across the characters enlightenment or Buddhahood, and the white paper the world of sentient beings. By placing Buddhahood in the midst of the world of sentient beings, this chart-poem visualizes the concept of the ‘interdependent co-arising of the Dharma Realm’; in other words, the notion that the world of sentient beings is one with the world of Buddha. The idea is that the two worlds are interdependent, and neither can exist without the other, and one equals the multitude and vice-versa. Buddha and sentient beings would, therefore, also

be one and the same. The concept of *beopgye yeongi* is the belief that the various beings in the phenomenal world appear distinct from one another only as a result of their interdependence and that in reality, they are no different from one another, all of them existing in the ‘middle path.’

In accordance with such a conviction, Uisang emphasized equality and harmony in his missions to bring the masses to Buddha's teachings. He also stressed equality among members of his order. As a matter of fact, some of Uisang's disciples were people of lowly origin or even former slaves, as exemplified by Jinjeong and Jitong. The pluralism and tolerance of Huayan Buddhism contributed to maintaining stability in Silla society during the turbulent period of the unification wars, helping it to deal with strife and conflicts in a constructive fashion. As Uisang stayed mostly in Buseok Temple in Yeongju, where he devoted his time to converting the masses to Buddhism and educating his disciples, he was not an influential figure

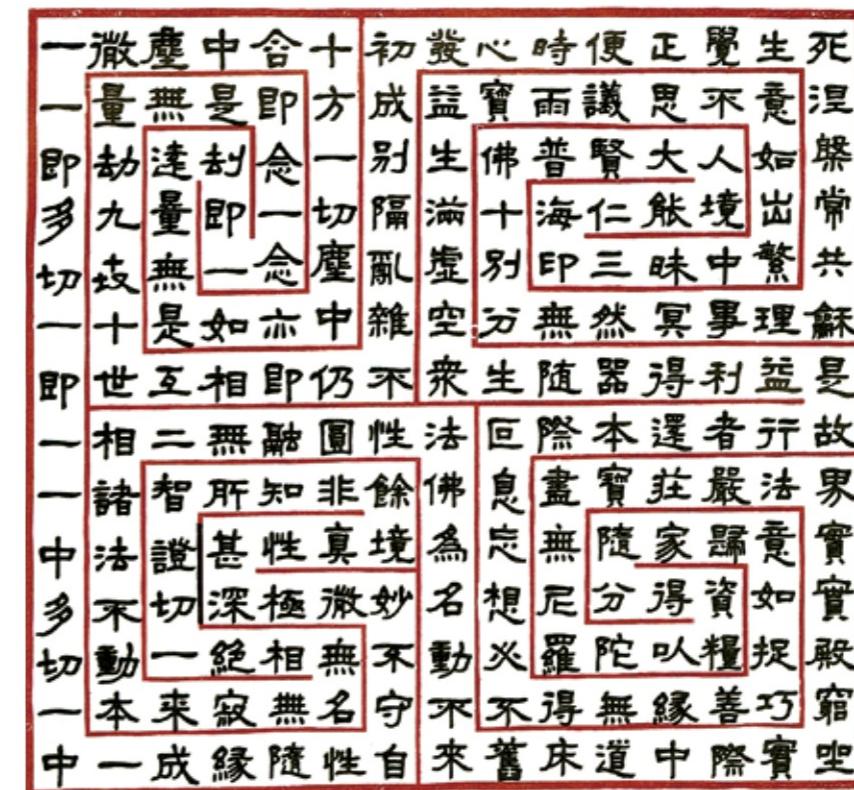


Fig 12. *Hwaeomilseung Beopgyedo* (The Realm of Dharma in Avatamsaka the One Vehicle) by Uisang

for the Buddhist circle in the capital city. The Buddhist scene in the capital was at that time dominated by esoteric Buddhism and Consciousness-only Buddhism. It was only much later when Uisang's disciples like Pyohun and Sillim developed close ties to the royal family, during King Gyeongdeok's reign, that Huayan Buddhism became a major school of thought at the forefront of Silla's Buddhist scholarship. However, unlike Consciousness-only Buddhist monks who were scholarly to a high degree and spent much of their time adding annotations to scriptures, Uisang's disciples were more interested in putting their beliefs into action, as was their master.

### Wonhyo's *Ilsim* Philosophy and *Hwajaeng* Doctrine

No discussion of the Buddhist thought of Mid-Silla would be complete without a review of the philosophy of Wonhyo (617–686). Prominent Buddhist thinkers of Silla of the likes of Woncheuk and Uisang, of the Consciousness-only or Huayan School, either studied in China or expanded on Chinese doctrines to develop their own systems of thought. In this regard, Wonhyo was unique. Not only did he not study in China, but his system of thought was distinct from Chinese Buddhist philosophies. Rather than receiving influence from China, he on the contrary influenced the Buddhism of China and Japan, leaving an indelible mark on the development of the religion in these countries.

Wonhyo was born in Amnyang-gun (present-day Gyeongsan, Gyeongsangbuk-do) to a father who was a mid-ranking government official. In 650, he attempted to go to China, together with Uisang, but his plan was foiled when he was mistaken for a spy by Goguryeo soldiers. Unable to continue their journey, Wonhyo and Uisang instead went to the Baekje region to meet the monk Bodeok and studied the *Nirvana Sutra* under him. The *Nirvana Sutra* is the main scripture formulating the notion of '*Ilseung*' or 'One Vehicle of Buddhahood' which is the belief that all Buddhist teachings converge into one and that this one teaching leads to Buddhahood. A famous legend has it that sometime later, Wonhyo again attempted to reach China, together with Uisang, but abandoned this plan and retraced his steps. One night during his journey, Wonhyo was woken up from sleep by thirst and unknowingly drank his fill of rainwater that had collected in a human skull. The next morning when he saw the true

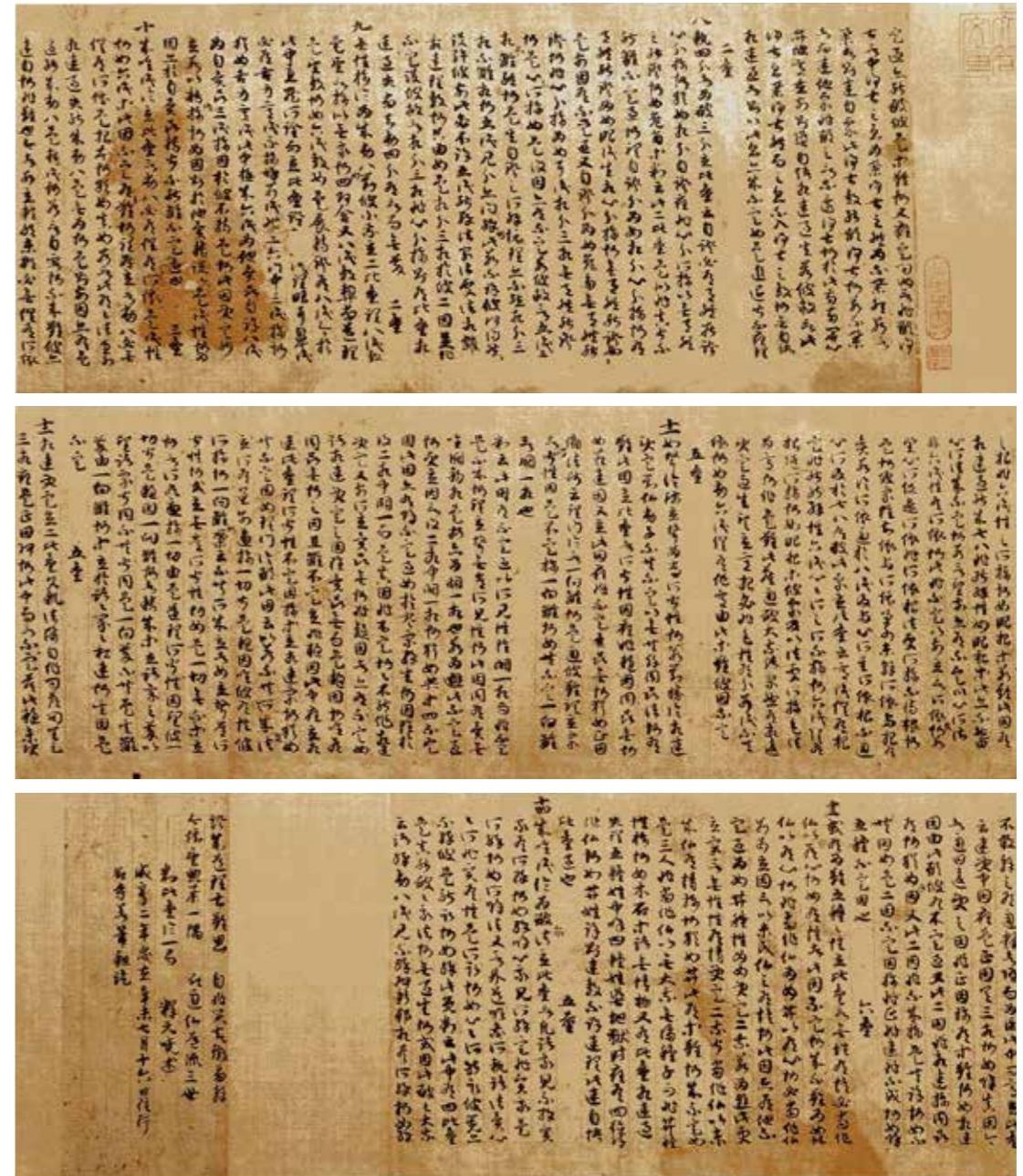


Fig 13. *Panbiryangnon* (Treatise on the Analysis of Knowing by Inference) by Wonhyo

nature of the delightful drink that had quenched his thirst, Wonhyo realized that everything in this world was a construction of the mind, and no longer felt the need to continue his journey to China. Thereafter, Wonhyo studied Buddhist scriptures newly translated by Hyeonjang and their annotations on his own. Based on the knowledge of old and new Buddhist theories thus acquired, Wonhyo built his own original system of thought.

Wonhyo was, furthermore, deeply interested in issues outside the religious field that affected his society and engaged in the Bodhisattva's work of compassion and charity to help, and bring solace to, the less privileged masses. Moreover, he took part in the Silla-Tang coalition forces' attack on Pyeongyang (661) and helped Silla troops steer clear of danger by deciphering coded communications used by the Goguryeo forces. Later, he left the priesthood and married Princess Yoseok, the daughter of King Taejong Muyeol and had a son, Seol Chong. The Middle-period Silla kings strove toward a compassionate rule over the people, and Wonhyo, as a monk championing the cause of the less privileged masses, incarnated this political value. This probably explains at least in part how the ties of marriage were created between Wonhyo and Silla's royal family.

The One Vehicle doctrine that Wonhyo learned from Bodeok, whom he met after his aborted journey to China, was in opposition with the Consciousness-only Buddhist doctrine introduced through Hyeonjang's translations. The most important point on which they diverged concerned the question whether all men could achieve Buddhahood. Consciousness-only Buddhist monks subscribed to the notion that there were five different types of human nature (*Oseong gakbyeoel seol*) and, therefore, believed that there were certain people who by their very nature could not attain Buddhahood. In contrast, the belief that all sentient beings can achieve Buddhahood was an essential element of the One Vehicle doctrine. To overcome this difference between the two views, Wonhyo turned to the philosophy expounded in *Daeseung gisillon* (Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana).

Although it is said in *Daeseung gisillon* that the text was translated from an Indian scripture during the time of Emperor Wu of Liang, the content strongly suggests that this was an original Chinese work. This book became noted in the Buddhist circles of East Asia mainly thanks to the outstanding as well as original annotations made by Wonhyo. There had been other commentaries to this work, predating Wonhyo's. But, none was comparable to Wonhyo's in terms of its influence on posterity.

This text states that all beings are the manifestations of the 'one mind' (*ilsim*) universally shared by all, and that although this mind has two different aspects, namely, '*jinmyeolmun*' (true suchness) and '*saengmyeolmun*' (arising and ceasing), they are merely distinctions between a calm or static and dynamic side of one and the same mind. Based on this idea, Wonhyo harmonized the various soteriological Buddhist philosophies into a synthetic view. Wonhyo declared *Daeseung gisillon* to be the "master of all treatises which can put many a debate to sleep." In his work for the popularization of Buddhism, Wonhyo erased the divide between the sacred and the secular by reaching out to people of all walks of life; hence, putting into action his belief in the One Mind linking all beings.

By so elaborating his own One Mind philosophy based on the treatise of Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana, Wonhyo took Silla's Buddhist philosophy, already a rich tradition recognized throughout East Asia, to a pinnacle. As has already been mentioned, before the philosophy of one mind based on *Daeseung gisillon*, Wonhyo's philosophical journey began with his encounter with the concept of *Tathāgatagarbha*, which he learned through Nirvana and Shelun doctrines. In his texts like *Gisin nonso* (Annotations to the Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana), *Geumgang sammae gyong non* (Treatise on the Vajrasamadhi Sutra) and *Hvaeomgyeong so* (Annotations to the Avatamsaka Sutra), Wonhyo argued that the Dharma Realm was a vast universe that is not hindered by temporal and spatial constraints.

Based on the *Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana* and the *Vajrasamadhi Sutra*, Wonhyo discussed the various theories that are opposed to and contradict one another from different perspectives to drive home the message that the fundamental goal of Buddhism is to attain the One Mind which is the absolute truth that transcends all differences. The idea articulated in his *Hwajaengnon* (Treatise on the reconciliation of the Ten Schools) that philosophies and theories that are seemingly opposed to each other are in reality not so also stems from this view. In this text, Wonhyo argued that major Buddhist concepts of his time that appear to be mutually contradictory are in fact versions of the same truth seen at a different level and explained through different methods, stressing that in order to gain access to truth, one must see through, and go beyond, its linguistic vehicle. At the same time as recognizing the diversity within Buddhist thinking, Wonhyo believed that the diverse traditions of thought ultimately converged

at a higher level and attempted to reconcile their differences. Buddhist texts written by Wonhyo also had a tremendous influence in China, Japan and even in distant India.

Following the unification of the Three Kingdoms, Silla strove to establish a powerful centralized state, and such a policy was coupled with generous support toward various orders of the state religion, Buddhism. This strong support from the state resulted in a remarkable advancement in Silla's Buddhist scholarship. The research into Buddhist philosophy in this period was centered on the Consciousness-only doctrine, Huayan philosophy and the Tathāgatagarbha doctrine. These three trends produced synergetic effects on Silla Buddhism, taking it to a new depth of philosophical understanding. This lively development in Silla's Buddhist thought in the period following the unification also contributed to the subsequent spread of Buddhism beyond the city lines of the royal capital to places across the country.

The thriving Buddhist research, moreover, resulted in the development of printing technology. Uisang's *Hwaeom ilseung beopgye yeongido*, for instance, appears to have been intended to be printed as a woodcut for wide distribution. The utilization of woodcut eventually led to woodblock printing, as evidenced by the *Great Dharani Sutra* enshrined in the interior of Seokgatap (Sakyamuni Pagoda). Around this time, woodblock printing in China and Japan was still at the stage of simple stamping-based printing. However, the *Great Dharani Sutra* of Seokgatap was printed using a much more sophisticated technique, identical to the woodblock printing technique used in the later era, thus attesting to the technical edge Silla had over its neighbors.

### Cityscape of the Capital and *Seongjeon* Temples

Near the entrances of Silla's capital city, stately *seongjeon* temples were built. Sacheonwangsa stood at the south entrance, Bongseongsa at the north entrance, Yeongmyosa at the west entrance and Bongdeoksa at the east entrance. Although these temples have long since vanished, some of the surviving elements such as the green-glazed bricks with the highly realistic bas-relief of the Divine General which used to decorate the pagoda of Sacheonwangsa or the Sacred Bell of King Seongdeok (Emile Bell) allow us to guess the majestic appearance these temples must have had.

Sacheonwangsa was considered to be the source of spiritual strength that

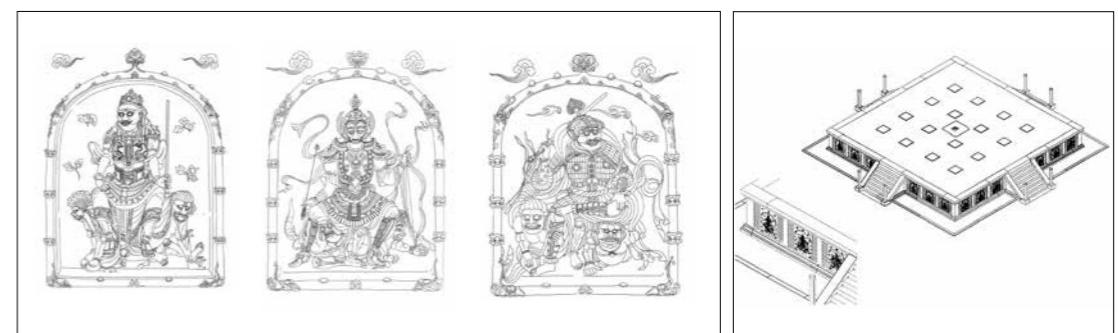


Fig 14. Clay statue and drawing of a Buddhist guardian excavated at the Sacheonwangsa Temple site in Gyeongju

allowed Silla to prevail in its war against Tang. Sacheonwangsa was perceived as the gate to Silla, the Land of Buddha. For example, the burial site of Queen Seondeok in the hillock above this temple was symbolically equated to Doricheon (*Trayastriṃsa* heaven), located at the summit of Mt. Sumeru. Far from simply being a temple situated at the southern tip of Silla's capital city, Sacheonwangsa guarded the entry to the Land of Buddha with which Silla was conflated according to an esoteric Buddhist belief.

With the *seongjeon* temple system, newly implemented during King Sinmun's reign, a series of grand temples, beginning with Bongseongsa, were built near all the entry points of Gyeongju, giving Silla's capital the veritable appearance of the Land of Buddha guarded by the Sacheonwang (Four Heavenly Kings) as its populace believed it to be. Under the *seongjeon* temple project led by Hyetong, a monk of esoteric Buddhism, temples were positioned according to a mandala-like plan that mirrored esoteric cosmology, so as to surround Gyeongju, the center of the universe.

The *seongjeon* temples on four sides of the capital were to connect to the nine *ju* (provinces) of Silla, symbolizing the nine sections of the universe, via the government roads that extended radially from it. These temples were positioned in such a way that when people approached Silla's capital, the first thing that greeted them was a *seongjeon* temple. Various state rituals to pray for the safety and prosperity of the royal family and the nation were held in the *seongjeon* temples. The view of the majestic and solemn temples and sumptuous rituals held there must have been awe-inspiring for all outsiders visiting the capital city as a powerful paean to the undying glory of Silla's monarchy.

Also, rites were regularly held in honor of the Gods of the Roads at the outskirts of the capital city, on all four sides to ward off epidemics and impurities. During these rites, a phallus was erected on the ground as a yang object opposing the yin energy. *Jangseung*, the guardian posts, erected at the entry point of a village in later eras, originated from none other than this ritualistic phallus. The construction of the *seongjeon* temples at its four gates and the exorcist rites held on the roads around had the symbolic effect of sealing Silla's capital city off from the rest of the country as a self-contained sacred space, untainted by negative or impure influence or energy. The spiritual landscape thus created at the border of the capital city was intended to impress upon both its residents and outsiders that Gyeongju was indeed the center of the country in the most emphatic sense of the word.

Gyeongju's cityscape and the stately rituals regularly held there thus served as a display of the power and authority of the state. The capital city as a whole was like a gigantic theater. The state rituals staged in this theater were meant to manifest the supreme power of the monarch for those coming into the capital city carrying tax grain as well as the officials residing there, eliciting loyalty to the Crown and drawing submission from them.

Although Middle-period Silla rulers were far from considering Silla above the suzerain-vassal relationship with Tang the victory in the recent war against the Chinese dynasty gave them confidence, as evidenced by the posthumous title 'Taejong' that King Muyeol earned after his passing. The national rituals, based on the *seongjeon* temple system, to pray for the safety of the nation and continuity of the dynasty, were also significant in this regard, insofar as they mirrored the view that Silla was the center of the world and celebrated the absolute power of the monarch.

### Development of Administrative Documents and the Invention of *Idu* Script

In Silla, there was in place a well-established system for transmitting and exchanging documents within the government. Although government documents were written in Chinese characters, they were not in the Chinese language. Unlike Korean, which is an agglutinative language with well-developed polite forms, tenses, inflection endings and postpositions, Chinese is an analytic language. Furthermore, Chinese syntax differed greatly from Korean syntax, making it hard for Koreans to understand the Chinese language. Silla people, at the same time as learning written Chinese, invented a new writing system called "*idu*" in which Chinese characters are used to phonetically transcribe Korean words.

Between the Chinese characters that form a dense block, Silla people conceived imaginary spaces where they inserted special symbols and grammatical markers such as prepositions and verb endings, thus rendering an agglutinative language out of Chinese graphs. The stem of a word was read as the sound of the Korean word corresponding to its Chinese meaning—the Chinese graphs were used in this case as glossograms—while endings or propositions were read in the Chinese sound—here, the Chinese graphs were used as phonograms. This way of representing the Korean language using

Chinese characters was later applied for the deciphering of Chinese scriptures; in other words, punctuations and commentaries were added between characters or between phrases to facilitate the understanding of a text.

Attempts at transcribing the various grammatical markers of the Korean language using Chinese characters had been continuously made since the early sixth century, as attested to by surviving evidence. In the sixth century, in neighboring Goguryeo, for instance, no further progress was made in terms of ability to write the Korean language, with regression seen at some levels. The opposite happened in Silla, around this time, with new ways of recording the Korean language continuously being developed.

Even before the end of the seventh century, the Silla people could perfectly represent their language using Chinese characters. Going beyond the rudimentary Goguryeo-style script which consisted in simply adding 言 (-da) at the end of a sentence, the Silla people utilized markers indicating the past tense and polite form of a verb. For example, to write the Korean verb *boda* (see), they used the Chinese character 見 which means to see and added the verbal ending 言. In this case, the stem 見 was read as a glossogram and was pronounced *bo*. Meanwhile, 言, used as a phonogram, was pronounced as *da*. Thus, 見言 was read as *boda*. By expanding on this basic rule, to write boatda, the past tense form of *boda*, the Silla people added 在 between the stem and the verbal ending; hence, 見在言. For the past tense of *boda* in polite form, in other words, *bosieotda*, they inserted 賦 after the stem; hence, 見賦在言.

As the *idu* script, offering nearly as much freedom of expression as the *hyangchal* script of Goryeo, was in use already in the mid-seventh century, even when Silla adopted, following the unification, Tang document style, the content of documents was continuously written in *idu*. This precedent was followed in Goryeo as well as in Joseon where all official government documents were written in *idu*, instead of in Chinese. The fact that government documents were drafted in *idu*, even during the Joseon period, in which most educated Koreans were proficient in written Chinese, suggests that the invention of *idu* was not due to the Silla people's inability to write Chinese. The *idu* script was invented rather because they desired to express their thoughts in their own language.

Moreover, when reading Chinese scriptures and texts, the Silla people added punctuation marks, marked the Korean order of words, and inserted grammatical markers in simplified *idu* between phrases or sentences, so that

they could be more or less immediately be translated into Korean. These punctuation marks and symbols added to a Chinese language text were known as *gugyeol*. *Gugyeol* was made into a comprehensive and coherent system by Seol Chong. Seol Chong taught Confucian scriptures to young scholars using texts containing *gugyeol*. The Japanese script *katakana* and *okoto-ten*, in fact, derived from the *idu* and *gugyeol* of Silla. Both *idu* and *gugyeol* are invaluable for the understanding of the history of the use and translation of Chinese characters in ancient East Asia.

### Everyday Life in the Royal Palace According to Wooden slips

Wooden slips, wooden writing tablets, were used for widely-varying purposes, from writing practice to drafting complex government documents. Even Wooden slips with a short text are often rich sources of insight into the daily life in Silla, and the vocabulary tends to be lively and vivid. The Wooden slips that were discovered in the royal palace's rear garden, the artificial lake Anapji (Wolji), or in the moat of Wolseong Palace are particularly valuable for the glimpses they offer into everyday life in the palace, which has otherwise remained mostly enshrouded in mystery.

The *munbo mokgan* (gate tablets), discovered at Anapji, for example, tell us how Silla's royal palace was guarded. A wooden tablet was created for each of the soldiers that stood guard at the various gates of the royal palace. A supervisor toured the palace to check whether and how well the guard duty was being carried out by the assigned soldiers and wrote down the results of the inspection on the soldiers' wooden slips. The results of inspection written down on the tablets affected the amount of rations the soldiers received. The use of wooden slips for the palace guard system in Silla also influenced ancient Japan. Gate slips in a similar style have been found in ancient Japanese palaces.

Wooden slips containing medical prescriptions have also been discovered inside the moat of Wolseong. Although a prescription Wooden slips dating from the eighth century had been found previously, this one is particularly significant as it provides evidence to the effect that Chinese medical texts had started to be read in Silla by the sixth century, and that medicines with known efficacies were administered in precisely measured doses. The pharmacists (*yaksa*) mentioned in the Stele of King Jinheung (568) were precisely those



Fig 15. Wooden slips excavated from the Wolji Pond site

who wrote and prepared such prescriptions for the king and aristocrats.

Wooden slips were also used as tags for food items and are frequently found attached to jars. Many of them contain names of preserved fish and seafood like *sikhae* (fish fermented by adding rice to it). In western coastal towns where salt was readily available, salted fish and seafood were produced in great quantities. In contrast, in the eastern coastal area where Gyeongju is located, salt was rarer. Hence, *sikhae*, fish and seafood fermented using grain, was more common in this area than salted fish and seafood. This is one reason why quite a few *mokgan* tags for *sikhae* have been found at Anapji. *Goseonghae*, one of the names of *sikhae* written on these *mokgan*, appears to be halibut *sikhae* which is frequently consumed in eastern coastal towns to this day.

In Silla's royal palace, fermented fish products were stored in large



Fig 16. Aerial view of the Wolji Pond site (Anapji) in Gyeongju

jars that were kept in a storage room. The Wooden slips contain precise dates of production so that the maturity of the fermented food is clearly known. The discovery of these food tags has opened up the possibility of researching into Silla's palace cuisine and culinary culture, something that was previously unthinkable.

## 5

## The Decline of Monarchical Power

### Improvement in the Relationship with Tang

The unification wars that brought Baekje and Goguryeo to their knees had far-reaching consequences that went beyond the confines of the Korean peninsula. They were in fact regional wars of a sort in which the belligerent parties were not limited to the ancient states of the Korean peninsula, but included two Chinese dynasties, Sui and Tang, two nomadic peoples, the Khitan and Mohe, and Japan. The relationship between Silla and Tang once military allies, deteriorated sharply starting in the eighth year of King Munmu's reign (688) when the former occupied the high lands of Baekje and adopted an integration policy to absorb the people of Goguryeo. The rising tensions between the two states eventually escalated into a full-blown war (Silla-Tang War, 670–676). As a result, diplomatic relations between the two countries were effectively non-existent for about fifteen years, between the eighth year of King Munmu's reign and the second year of King Seongdeok's reign (703).

During this period around the late seventh century and early eighth century when Silla was cut off from Tang it saw itself as an empire in its own right, albeit a small one. The Silla king, for example, had Anseung, a member of the Goguryeo royal family, live in Geummaje, investing him as the 'King of Goguryeo' (later 'King of Bodeok-guk'). Also, the country was

newly organized around nine ju following the way the mythical King Wu had divided China. The utilization of documents like '*sangpyo*' or '*joseo*', which were documents submitted or issued by an emperor, rather than a mere king, and the conferral of the posthumous title 'Taejong' on King Muyeol after his passing are also examples pointing toward the ideological and institutional realignment of Silla to reflect its new vision of itself as the center of the world. However, this phase was to be short-lived, lasting only between the reigns of Kings Munmu and Sinmun.

Moreover, Silla sent the delegations of Goguryeo (Bodeok-guk), whose king received his investiture from Silla, to Japan on several occasions, providing them with military escorts. During the same period, Sushen people were sometimes included in Silla's own diplomatic delegations. This behavior was clearly intended to overawe Japan and provide the impression that Silla was an empire ruling over Goguryeo and the Sushen (Mohe). There is also the possibility that Silla actually treated Japanese delegations as envoys of a vassal state, receiving them according to a tributary protocol.

Toward the late seventh century, there was a resurgence of the various Northeast Asian peoples of the likes of the Tuju (Turks), Mohe, Khitan and Hae that had long been oppressed by Tang. Silla saw in this development that was unfavorable for Tang an opportunity to mend its relationship with it. In 683 (3rd year of King Sinmun's reign), Anseung of Bodeok-guk was given the surname 'Kim' and was made to reside in the capital city. This move was part of a plan to abolish Bodeok-guk (Goguryeo), a vassal state within Silla, so as to appease Tang by no longer claiming the status of a suzerain state. This caused a rebellion to break out in Bodeok-guk during the following year (4th year of King Sinmun's reign: 684). With this rebellion quashed, 'Little Goguryeo' within Silla was brought to an end. In 686 (6th year of King Sinmun's reign), the king sent envoys to Tang to ask for the *Liji* (Book of Rites). Empress Consort Wu sent the book *Jixiong yaoli* (K. *Gilhyung yorye*, 吉凶要禮) with the envoys. All of these moves were clearly measures undertaken as part of an overall bid to reconcile with Tang by showing Silla's willingness to accept the China-led regional order as well as the rituals practiced in Tang China.

The geopolitical landscape later worsened for Silla when in 698, Dae Joyeong founded Balhae, after having managed to escape Yeongju in spite of being pursued by Tang troops and join his Mohe supporters and the former people of Goguryeo. Silla could now no longer afford to keep Tang

at arm's length. During the reign of King Seongdeok (702–737) and that of Xuanzong of Tang (712–755), Silla and Tang rapidly reverted to their previous relationship as close allies against the backdrop of the growing might of Balhae, which was to lead to the Balhae-Tang War.

### The Balhae-Tang War and Silla's Entering the War

In 719, Dae Joyeong (King Go of Balhae) died and was succeeded by his eldest son, Dae Muye (King Mu). The newly-crowned king adopted an independent era name, taking also other measures to clearly establish Balhae's status as an independent nation. King Mu strove to expand Balhae's territory, unifying, among others, the various Mohe tribes. His posthumous title *Mu*, meaning 'military,' was chosen in recognition of his outstanding accomplishments in conquering new territories. The 'Account of Balhae' in *Xin tangshu* (New Book of Tang) records, "When Muye became the king and greatly expanded the nation's territory, many barbarian peoples of the northeast feared him and submitted themselves to his rule." The fact that a great wall was built in 721 (20th year of King Seongdeok's reign) along the northern border of Silla was also a consequence of King Mu's territorial expansion campaigns.

In 727, Balhae sent envoys to Japan for the first time. The diplomatic letter that the Balhae envoys carried was brimming with the pride and aplomb of King Mu who stated, "I came to rule over several countries and have a string of vassal states under my care, which allowed me to recover the old territory of Goguryeo and revive the customs and mores of Buyeo." What caused Balhae to make such an overture to Japan was in part to reign in Silla, which was then rapidly restoring its relationship with Tang. At that time, tensions were mounting between Balhae and Tang over the territory of the Black Water Mohe in the northeast. The conflict was set in motion when the Black Water Mohe in the valley of the Amur River (C. Heilongjiang), fearing an attack from King Mu, sent envoys to Tang. Emperor Xuanzong declared this area a territory of Tang, naming it Heishuizhou and dispatching a governor. Balhae took this decision of Tang as a hostile move signaling the latter's intention to join forces with the Black Water Mohe to attack it from both sides.

Feeling thus beleaguered, Balhae sought to break out of its isolation

by approaching Japan. In 726, King Mu ordered his brother, Dae Munye, to take up arms against Heishuizhou. However, Dae Munye opposed the campaign against Heishuizhou, calling it an unwise decision that could drive Balhae to self-destruction. But, he was unable to dissuade King Mu from this decision and was forced to head out for Heishuizhou. Upon reaching the border, he once again asked the king to reconsider his decision. Irate about Dae Munye's insistence and disobedience, King Mu dispatched his cousin, Dae Ilha, to replace him as general, ordering the former to be brought before him. Faced with this situation, Dae Munye chose to go into exile in Tang China.

Negotiations for the repatriation of Dae Munye ensued between Balhae and Tang further escalating the tensions between them. In 732, the Balhae general Jang Munhyu attacked Dengzhou in the Shandong Peninsula, on King Mu's order, and its governor Wei Jun was killed during this attack. In retaliation, Tang sent Dae Munye to Youzhou where he raised an army and launched an assault on Balhae. In 733 (32nd year of King Seongdeok's reign), Kim Saran was sent to Silla to mount an attack on Balhae from its southern border. Tang was then unable to put sufficient pressure on Balhae on its own and needed Silla to effectively counter it.

Silla welcomed the Tang dynasty's request to join the war, as this would not only put a stop to Balhae's southward expansion, but also do wonders for the relationship between the two countries that had soured since the war. However, it is unclear whether Silla was truly invested in this war or whether it was really intent on helping Tang. Silla had its troops withdraw from the frontline, and the reason presented to the Tang side was that they were caught by a cold spell and heavy snow which killed over half of the contingent. When Dae Joyeong escaped Yeongju and was in a hostile standoff with Tang Silla helped him to settle, bestowing upon him the title Daeachan. Such was Silla's stance toward Balhae from the outset. Although King Seongdeok was mindful of stopping Balhae's southern progress, Silla's participation in this war was also meant to mollify Tang and improve the relationship between the two. Indeed, depending on the situation, Silla either exacerbated the tensions between Balhae and Tang or took a wait-and-see attitude. As it happened, this strategy ultimately proved fruitful. In 735, when the Tang dynasty complained about its relaxed attitude in this conflict, Silla used this opportunity to make the Chinese concede the area south of the Pae River (present-day Daedong River) to it. With this

concession, the Silla-Tang War came to an official conclusion.

Later when King Mu of Balhae died and was succeeded by his son, King Mun, Tang made peace with Balhae. King Mun received investiture from Tang as the king of Balhae and peace was restored between the two countries. A period of turbulence in the East Asian region following the Silla-Tang War thus drew to a close, giving way to a more stable regional order led by Tang with Silla, Balhae and Japan peacefully coexisting. Diplomatic envoys were exchanged regularly between these countries, and civilian exchange activities were also increased. Through this, the advanced cultural goods and institutions of Tang were introduced to Silla, Balhae and Japan, helping with national growth and contributing to the flourishing of the ancient cultures in these countries.

### Silla-Balhae Relations

Silla both exchanged and competed with Balhae over the 220 years of the latter's existence. However, the recent argument that there existed among the people of Silla and Balhae a shared belief in their common ethnic origin not only lacks evidence, but risks creating a skewed perception of Korean history.

Xin Tangshu relates, for instance, that the Silla people looked down on the people of Balhae, calling them barbarians with sharp teeth and nails, who indulged in cannibalism. The Silla people indeed held a hostile attitude toward the people of Balhae. Chuseok, the holiday originating from Gabae, the day of a weaving competition, became, at some point in Silla's history, a day commemorating the victorious war against Balhae. Moreover, in a diplomatic document sent to Tang drafted by Choe Chiwon, Balhae, described as an heir of Goguryeo, was likened to a cancer. Evidence of the hostility felt by Silla toward Balhae is therefore quite ample.

According to Chinese records, there were in Balhae, five main roads leading to neighboring countries, and one of them was 'Sillado' (the road to Silla). Sillado began in Sanggyeong, the capital city of Balhae and ran through Donggyeong, its eastern capital, then to Namgyeong, the southern capital, before arriving in Cheonjeong-gun County of Silla (present-day Deogwon, Hamnam). Between Donggyeong, located in the valley of the Duman River, and Cheonjeong-gun of Silla, there were thirty-nine stations.

*Samguk sagi* records two occurrences of Balhae establishing contact with Silla via this road. Furthermore, there is a Japanese record indicating that the Tang envoy Han Zhaocai used this road to travel from Balhae to Silla. In addition to linking Balhae and Silla, Sillado was at times used for Balhae envoys traveling to Japan. the first lunar month of 777, Balhae's diplomatic envoys headed out for Japan from Namgyeong's Tohopo via Sillado. Although an exchange of envoys does seem to have occurred between Balhae and Silla, there is no evidence suggesting the existence of trade between the two countries, or any form of lasting diplomatic ties. Two instances of envoys being sent between the two countries mentioned in *Samguk sagi* or the existence of Sillado are a fairly meager basis to suppose a friendly sentiment based on an ethnic kinship between the two countries.

Perhaps as important for the understanding of Korean history as how Silla and Balhae perceived each other would be how Koreans of later periods perceived these two countries. The fact that Balhae is a successor to Goryeo was clearly acknowledged by the Silla people. The people of Goryeo, which unified the Later Three Kingdoms, saw Balhae as a kindred country and after its fall, welcomed its people amongst them. Moreover, *Gaoli tujing* (K. *Goryeo dogyeong*: Illustrated travelogue to Goryeo) by Xu Jing, a Song-dynasty scholar who visited Goryeo as an envoy of the Chinese imperial court, and *Jewang ungi* (Songs of emperors and kings) by Yi Seunghyu clearly demonstrate that the learned people of Goryeo perceived Balhae as being the precursor of Goryeo.

In late Joseon, Yu Deukgong (1748–?) argued that the period during which Silla and Balhae co-existed should be regarded as the North and South Kingdoms period. In the preface to his *Balhaego* (Study of Balhae), he wrote, "When the Kim clan occupied the south, the Dae clan occupied the north, calling it Balhae." Goryeo historians, he states, made a serious mistake of omitting this chapter of Korean history where two kingdoms existed north and south of each other. Yu Deukgong's remark has a great resonance for our time as well.

Posterity might very well call the current period of Korean history in which the peninsula is divided into the northern and southern halves the "North and South Korea period," Hence, understanding the internal and external political situations faced by Silla and Balhae and objectively analyzing their respective history are likely to help us better assess our own situation of division and proactively respond to the current of world history.

This, however, is not to say that we must equate our time with the North and South Kingdoms period. Notwithstanding, the standoff between Silla and Balhae and the surrounding structure of geopolitical allegiances are rich in implications for our own time, and we stand to gain from pondering these implications.

### Tributary Trade with Tang

The investiture-tribute relationship that Silla had maintained with Tang since the reign of King Seongdeok as did many other countries in the region was the realization of the ancient Chinese political ideal of *wangdo* (C. *wang dao*: the ‘way of the king’) at the level of external relations. For rulers of countries neighboring China, this relationship, although nominally somewhere between a suzerain and a vassal, did not entail an actual political subjugation, but rather a practical approach to ensure international peace and stability. In Silla’s case, becoming part of this system also helped ensure the stability of its regime. Human and material exchanges between Silla and Tang sharply increased around this time. During the reign of King Seongdeok (702–737) alone, Silla engaged in exchanges with the Chinese dynasties on as many as forty-five occasions. The advanced cultural goods of the High Tang period were thus brought into Silla, which was also exposed to cultures of the western world through Tang, resulting in cultural leaps in the Korean Peninsula. Tang China referred to Silla as the nation of *junzi* (君子, gentlemen) or the country of *renyi* (仁義, benevolence and righteousness), in praise of the cultural blossoming the latter was experiencing at that time.

Silla’s diplomatic relations with Tang were not limited to exchanges of envoys and delegates. In addition to political and cultural ties, Silla actively conducted trade with Tang in the form of ‘tribute missions.’ Silla’s tributary trade with Tang also allowed Japan to trade with it. Prior to the unification of the Three Kingdoms, trade goods Silla sent to Tang were mainly local specialty produce or goods. But, after the unification, the range of products became more varied and included technically-sophisticated craft items. Wool carpets with highly realistic woven designs or moving miniatures like *manbulsang* were some of the examples that are said to have impressed the Tang emperors.

With the unification of the Three Kingdoms, Silla’s territory and population grew to one and a half times its previous size. This ushered in a period of prosperity, and royals and aristocrats led an affluent lifestyle. As a result of this, the demand for goods increased exponentially as well, among members of the ruling class. Toward the end of the seventh century, the number of markets in Gyeongju rose to three. Members of the royal family and aristocrats had the best artisans in the country at their disposal, producing luxury items for them in their privately-owned workshops. They nevertheless turned to overseas markets in search of better and more varied products. China—where luxury goods arrived from all over the world—the Silk Road, and maritime routes were the main sources of goods for Silla’s elite.

### Diplomatic Tensions with Japan

Silla and Japan were former enemies in the Baekje restoration wars. However, after the fall of Goguryeo, as it was now in need of an ally in the face of pressure from Tang, Silla made an overture to Japan in 668 (8th year of King Munmu’s reign) by sending a diplomatic delegation. Thereafter, the two countries engaged in exchanges at a lively pace and maintained close ties with each other. Since the resumption of the diplomatic relationship, Silla sent delegations on a total of forty-five occasions with the last one being sent in 779 (15th year of King Hyegong’s reign), with Japanese delegations being sent to Silla on twenty-five occasions during the same period. Thanks to this exchange activity, between the late seventh century and the early eighth century, Japan acquired from Silla the knowledge and advanced cultural goods necessary for establishing the rule of law.

Later, however, when the relationship between Silla and Tang gradually improved starting in the reign of King Seongdeok, and the legal system in Japan came to completion with the enactment of the Taiho Code, the two countries started to clash over issues such as diplomatic protocols. The source of friction was the Japanese insistence on a relationship in which Silla would be a vassal state to Japan. This was indeed a time when Japan, in emulation of the Tang Empire, adopted a vision of itself as an imperial state and projected this vision onto its external relations. However, even during the period between the late seventh and early eighth century, when Silla was highly apprehensive of Tang and Japan forming a coalition against

it, agreeing to a suzerain-vassal relationship with the latter was unthinkable.

On this subject, it is worth noting the length of the visits of the two countries' delegations. The visit by Gyeonilbansa, the Silla delegation to Japan, never exceeded four months and usually lasted only two to three months. On the other hand, the Japanese delegation tended to stay in Silla for a minimum of seven months and at times for over ten months. What this says is that despite Japan's wish to be 'Little China,' Silla did not have much to learn from it. The Japanese delegation had a far lengthier stay as its members had more to learn and acquire from Silla.

Starting in the eighth century, as Silla's relationship with Tang progressively thawed, its relationship with Japan became commensurately more distant. Such a change can be noted from an incident in 689 during King Sinmun's reign, in which Japan complained about how the members of the Silla delegation were lower-ranking officials than before. The deterioration of the two countries' relationship, gradual at the beginning, accelerated subsequently with the emergence of a new binary geopolitics in East Asia following the founding of Balhae. Japan became an ally of Balhae to form a united front against the Silla-Tang alliance. In 733, Silla sent reinforcements to help Tang in its war against Balhae. Silla's assistance was rewarded in 735 with Tang's recognition of its sovereignty over the entire area of the Korean peninsula south of the Daedong River. Between 726 and 732, the honeymoon period between Silla and Tang, no diplomatic delegation was sent to Japan. In the interim, Balhae sent its envoys to Japan (727), with diplomatic ties becoming established between the two countries.

After it once again became a close ally of Tang much as it was before the war between the two, Silla shifted its attitude toward Japan and adopted a more high-handed tone. In 734, the Silla delegation was expelled from Japan for using the expression Wangseong-guk (country ruled by Chakravartin) to designate their own country. In 736, the Japanese delegation complained about their visit to Silla, saying, "They did not abide by the customary protocols and did not show themselves amenable." The Japanese side was infuriated by Silla's attitude. They even discussed a military strike on Silla in retaliation. Undeterred by the swelling discontent of Japan, King Gyeongdeok expelled some Japanese diplomatic envoys in 742, on account of their arrogant behavior. Moreover, in 743, in official trade documents sent to Japan, the word *jo* (調), an honorific term designating goods for the Japanese rulers, was eliminated, and replaced by *tomo*, (土毛) a general term meaning 'specialty products.' Vexed by the casual

tone of the new trade documents, the Japanese court immediately dismissed the Silla envoys.

To sum up, starting in 733, the year when the war broke out between Tang and Balhae, the relationship between Silla and Japan sharply deteriorated. Following the reconciliation with Tang, there was a turnaround in Silla's attitude toward Japan. Japan protested against Silla's now haughty attitude, accusing it of breaching the customary practices that had been in place between the two countries from before 733.

### Increase in Trade with Japan

Even as the diplomatic wrangling went on, however, Silla continued to send delegations to Japan. Silla delegates were sent five times around this period; in 732, 734, 738, 742 and 743. The size of the Silla delegations to Japan in this period was unprecedented and grew year after year. According to *Shoku nibongi* (Chronicles of Japan, continued, from 697–791), the number of delegates, while it was twenty in 714, forty in 719, fifteen in 723 and forty in 732, grew to one hundred forty-seven in 738, one hundred eighty-seven in 742, seven hundred in 752, two hundred eleven in 763, ninety-one in 764 and one hundred eighty-seven in 769, two hundred thirty-five in 774. At a time when the relationship between the two countries soured, the size of the delegation surprisingly kept increasing until 752.

At that time, an office named Waejeon, belonging to the Naeseong, was in charge of diplomatic affairs with Japan. The Naeseong was the royal household agency overseeing matters related to the royal family and had numerous handicraft-related offices under it. Waejeon is presumed to have been responsible for administering affairs related to trade with Japan, such as promoting the production of export goods destined for the latter country and managing the transportation and warehousing of trade goods. The fact that so many handicraft-related offices were managed by the royal household agency means that the royal family had a monopoly over craft production. On the other hand, it also suggests that the royal family was a great source of demand for handicrafts. The royal family must have been a particularly large consumer of handicrafts imported from Japan.

The details of the trade between the two countries have been known about for some of the years. In 686, some sixty different products were

traded and in 688 eighty. In 714, Japan is said to have given to the Silla delegation 5,405 geun (斤) of silkworm cotton in payment for the goods they brought. The overall volume of trade between Silla and Japan increased considerably from the late seventh century. The increase in the size of Silla's delegations to Japan, observed since 732, may be also explained by the growing volume of trade goods. Meanwhile, the fact that the Waejeon reported to the Naeseong suggests that trade with Japan was led directly by the royal family.

In addition to the royal family, *jingol* aristocrats also took an active part in trade with Japan. Top-ranking government officials like Sangjaesang, in league with the royal family, were closely involved in trade-related affairs. The Japanese, for instance, thought that the turnabout that occurred in Silla's attitude toward them around 733 was due to the death of Sangjaesang Kim Sunjeong, a pro-trade minister, and Sagong's appointment to this post. Although Sagong is widely perceived as a statesman with an anti-Japanese stance, the size of Silla's delegations increased yet further after 733. This is because trade with Japan was not something that Silla's ruling elite could easily forego regardless of who held the office of Sangjaesang.

How keenly Silla's ruling class was invested in external trade during King Gyeongdeok's reign is well attested to by the anecdote in which a certain Jang Chun, resident of Ugeum-ri, Gyeongju was shipwrecked in a stormy sea during a trade trip, in 745, and was ultimately rescued. Silla's volume of trade further expanded starting in 733 when its relationship with Tang was normalized. Trade interests also overrode other concerns for Japan which, in spite of a growingly uneasy relationship with Silla, took no steps to stop the entry of the latter's trade delegations into Kyushu. This pro-trade atmosphere explains the continuous expansion in the size of Silla's delegations to Japan from 733.

### Silla's Export Goods to Japan during the Eighth Century

One of the main export products in eighth century Silla was brassware. The much-prized brassware of late Joseon which even led to the expression 'anseong-machum' [perfect fit or match] were, as a matter of fact, produced as part of a tradition that goes back to the Silla period. Silla brassware came in a vast variety, ranging from bowls to trays and spoons. These shiny

golden-hued utensils, a rage among Japanese aristocrats, were the flagship product group exported to the archipelago.

Brassware was known in Silla as *samna* (迦羅) which was the origin of 'sabura,' a term which had been used in Japan since the eighth century to refer to brassware. In time, the knowledge about the origin of *sabura*, the Japanese-style pronunciation of '*samna*,' was lost. Interestingly, a Japanese text, dating from around the tenth century, explains that '*sabura*' originates from 'Silla,' it being a famous source of brassware. Just as the popularity of Chinese porcelain caused the English to call porcelain wares in general 'china,' the Japanese also called brassware '*sabura/Silla*'.

Also noteworthy is the fact that a similar word was used in China to refer to brassware. In twelfth-century China, the word *sira* (斯羅) was used to designate brassware. A Chinese scholar of that time, besides, conjectured that the word '*sira*' could have derived from '*Silla*', given that both Silla and Goryeo were big exporters of brassware. Hence, brassware was synonymous with Silla at that time, both for Japanese and Chinese people. This was the extent of the popularity of Silla brassware in East Asia.

Surviving records offering glimpses into Silla's trade with Japan are in fact quite numerous. Incredibly, some of the Silla goods exported to Japan, nearly 1,200 years ago, have survived still in their original wrappings and preserved in vivid colors. In Shosoin, the storage house of Todai Temple in Japan, everyday items used in the imperial household during the Nara period are preserved in a surprisingly intact condition, alongside historic items used in the temple itself. Astonishingly, not a single one of some 9,000 such items stored in Shosoin shows even the faintest sign of fading or wear.

Many of the treasures of Shosoin, which belonged to members of the Nara-period Japanese ruling class, are in fact foreign goods that were brought into Japan via the Silk Road or by sea from the Arab world, China or Southeast Asia. This has served as the basis for the claim that ancient Japan was the final destination of the Silk Road, and that its culture was cosmopolitan, connected with world cultures. The official explanation for the sources of these treasures is currently that they were brought to Japan by Japanese delegations or monks who traveled to China. Indeed, some of the items housed in Shosoin may have arrived in Japan in this way. However, Japan at that time had little exchange with the outside world due to its poor seafaring skills, let alone its nearly non-existent exchange with China. Therefore, this explanation runs counter to the known facts about



Fig 17. *Jwaparigaban* Document from the Shoshojin collection in Japan

Japan of this period.

The mystery surrounding the source of the Shoshojin treasures was finally unraveled in 1975 when the excavation of Anapji in Gyeongju began. The everyday artifacts used by Silla's royal family and aristocrats, yielded through this excavation, were surprisingly similar to the items of Shoshojin. The bronze scissors discovered at Anapji, for instance, are nearly identical to those in the collection of Shoshojin, both in the shape and surface design, as though crafted by the same artisan. That the Japanese ruling elite used items of the same style and type as Silla's ruling class can only be explained

by the fact that Japan was within Silla's trade sphere. Silla was the dominant player of international trade in East Asia from the eighth century. Silla's trade ships sailing to their various destinations in the region, across stormy seas seemed almost supernatural to the Japanese of that period. As a matter of fact, quite a few items in the collection of Shoshojin can be considered of Silla origin with certainty. One of them is the cover of a Buddhist scripture roll, which became famous for the Silla census document it contained. Otherwise, there are medicines of Silla origin, contained in Silla pottery ware, like *yangji* (sheep tallow) and ginseng. The *gayageum*, known in Japan as *Sillageum* at that time, is another such item. This *gayageum* is covered with a gold wave design at the bottom, on the front, with graceful floral motifs placed in-between the waves. The bridges on which the strings are stretched are also decorated with gold floral motifs, adding to the magnificence of the instrument. The instrument seems as though it could come alive at any moment, should an experienced hand pluck these strings, to awaken the sound of Silla from its slumber of a thousand years.

Although items like the ones described above might have been gifts from Silla, there are many other items of Silla origin in the collection of Shoshojin which could only have been brought there through commercial transactions between the two countries. Brassware items that were used by monks of Todai Temple are a fine case in point. Of note is the fact that the brassware items in Shoshojin are known as *sabari*, a term no longer in use in Japan. The *sabari* ware collection of Shoshojin is rather vast, comprising 436 bowls, 700 plates and 345 spoons. '*Sabari*' is one of the derivatives of the Silla word '*samna*', like '*sabura*' mentioned earlier.

As further evidence of their origin, an ancient document, drafted in Silla in the early eighth century, was discovered inside a set of nesting bowls, placed between two bowls. These bowls are believed to have been used during meals in Buddhist temples. The ancient document was probably placed in-between the nesting bowls as a packaging material to prevent the surface of the dishes from becoming scratched.

In Silla, discarded official government documents were recycled for use as packaging materials. Also, there is a set of *sabari* spoons of Silla origin that has never been used and is still preserved in its original packaging. A round spoon is wrapped together with an oval spoon in paper, and ten of these sets of two spoons are then tied tightly together with a string. Given the important quantity of *sabari* items and how some of them are still in their



Fig 18. *Sillageum* Lute from the Shoshoin collection in Japan

original packaging, it is mostly likely that Todai Temple purchased them in a large quantity through whatever channel may have existed at that time. There is, furthermore, a folding screen in Todai Temple which yielded a wealth of information about the trade conducted between Silla and Japan in 752.

### Silla Delegation of 752 and *Baisiragi Motsuke* (貲新羅物解)

In Shoshoin, there is an ancient folding screen, titled *Torige ritsujo*, which depicts a beautiful woman standing against a backdrop of trees and rocks. Her clothes are decorated with actual bird feathers glued to the surface of the screen. During a repair of this eight-panel folding screen, a series of ancient Japanese documents which were used as the linings and backings were discovered. Currently, some thirty such sheets have been recovered. These documents proved to be itemized lists of goods Japanese aristocrats wished to buy from the Silla delegation of 752 that were submitted to the government agency in charge of the matter. The list contains the names, quantities and prices of the desired items. These documents, used to request the permission to purchase Silla goods, were referred to as '*baisiragi motsuke*' (an order form document).

Items listed in these documents include both goods produced in Silla and rare items procured from the Chinese market or Arab merchants trading via the Silk Road or sea routes. Silla-produced goods ranging from medicinal herbs like ginseng and dyes like brazilwood to gold and other minerals, samna brassware utensils, ritual objects, wool carpets, food products, leather

goods and books. Exotic goods included incense, cosmetics and dyes. These were products that were rather pricy while not being bulky. The product mix was therefore ideal for the people of Silla as they could make a good profit without having to overload their ships. Based on the documents identified thus far alone, Silla sold some 200 items of 100 varieties to Japan. These being documents concerning officially-authorized transactions that have fortuitously survived, one can easily imagine how vast the actual volume of trade must have been.

In 752 (11th year of King Gyeongdeok's reign), Silla sent a delegation of 700 members onboard seven ships to Japan. This unprecedented size of Silla's trade delegation suggests a rather colossal volume of goods exported to Japan, especially if one includes civilian transactions. When the 752 delegation arrived in Dazaifu in Kyushu, 370 members stayed there, with the rest heading to Nara, Japan's capital at that time. They arrived in Nara on the 14th day of the sixth lunar month, after a trip that lasted over two months and a half. About one half of all delegates remained in Dazaifu or Naniwa in Osaka to conduct unofficial trade. In other words, Silla's delegation to Japan was not purely diplomatic in nature, but its purpose was also commercial in great part. The delegation's members were business delegates and deal-makers, arriving laden with the world's finest goods. Based on the surviving *baisiragi motsuke*, a large proportion of the artifacts in the collection of Shoshoin are items that were purchased from Silla delegations.

In Japan, as the diplomatic tug-of-war was going on with Silla, they tried to develop new import channels other than the one with Silla, for instance, by sending their own delegations to Tang or Balhae. But these alternatives proved ineffective. The Japanese, therefore, settled for a compromise solution of conducting trade with Silla through Dazaifu in Kyushu, while not exchanging diplomatic envoys with it. In 768, the Japanese emperor distributed silkworm cotton to Japanese aristocrats to use as payment toward Silla goods, in amounts ranging from 1,000 to 20,000 *dun* (J. *don*); a fact illustrative of the changing relationship between the two countries. The diplomatic spats between the two countries, begun in 733, gave rise to a new mode of trade via Dazaifu as the intermediary. Silla seemed far from minding this change, probably because the primary goal it pursued in its relationship with Japan was trade profits. The trade activity conducted in 752 must also be seen as being in continuity with this line of policy adopted by Silla.

As mentioned already, Japan tried to treat Silla envoys as envoys of a

vassal state, provoking protest from its government. In spite of this, the two countries continued to maintain a relationship. The relationship between the two was uninterrupted mainly because from 738 (2nd year of King Hyoseong's reign) Silla continuously sent delegations whose sole mission was to conduct trade in Dazaifu in Kyushu. After this period, there is virtually no record of diplomatic activity between Silla and Japan, except those concerning a handful of incidents involving Tang. In 764, the Silla government was asked to verify on behalf of Tang whether the Japanese monk Gyeyung who left China after studying there for Japan by way of Balhae had arrived safely. The Silla government seized this opportunity to send envoys to Japan to reestablish contact. Silla again sent envoys to Japan in 769 (5th year of King Hyegong's reign) and 774 (10th year of King Hyegong's reign) to relay the letters of Fujiwara Kiyokawa, the head of the Japanese delegation to Tang. However, even in these cases, the two countries dealt with each other through the Jipsaseong for the Silla side and the Dazaifu for the Japanese side, and only concerned themselves with the specific matters at hand.

Japan also needed Silla's help to ensure that their delegations to Tang reached China safely through the sea routes. In 779, officials of Dazaifu were dispatched to Silla to request that the Japanese envoys who were washed ashore in Tamna, on their way back from China, and were detained there be released and repatriated. Silla agreed to release the Japanese castaways and made a step toward resuming its relationship with Japan by sending envoys. But, Japan, intent on playing the role of a suzerain vis-à-vis both Silla and Balhae, once again demanded a formal diplomatic missive (*pyomun*) from the Silla king. Weary of the Japanese attitude, Silla no longer sent envoys to Japan thereafter.

However, the real reason why Silla ended official diplomatic relations with Japan appears to have been the improving geopolitical conditions in the region. There had been a thaw in the relationship between Balhae and Tang since the reign of King Mun, resulting in the overall easing of political and military tensions in Northeast Asia. This made it unnecessary for Silla to maintain an amicable relationship with Japan at all costs. On the Japanese side, they were now able to trade with Tang by way of Balhae; in other words, no longer dependent on Silla for this purpose. Hence, the volume of trade between Silla and Japan gradually declined starting from the mid-eighth century. Meanwhile, some of the void left by the government in

trade with Japan, was filled by private merchants of Silla. As Balhae and Japan moved closer to each other, the relationship between Silla and Japan became commensurately more distant.

### Ominous Developments Heralding the End of the Middle Period Prosperity

Of the 584 natural disasters recorded in *Samguk sagi*, 240 occurred during the eighth and ninth centuries. This is nearly twice the incidence than occurred in other centuries. By reign, natural disasters were most numerous during the times of King Seongdeok (forty-two), King Gyeongdeok (twenty-eight) and King Hyegong (twenty-eight), showing a pattern of high concentration in the later part of the Middle Period. What this says is that the period between the reigns of Seongdeok and Gyeongdeok, perceived as the height of Silla's prosperity, was paradoxically the most unstable, disaster-ridden era.

Even when one considers only natural disasters that have a direct impact on agriculture and the lives of the peasantry, such as famine, disease, flood, drought, unseasonal snow, frost, hail or insect damage, the pattern is similar. The incidence sharply increased in the early eighth century, during the reign of King Seongdeok to reach a peak in the mid-eighth century to the early ninth century before falling in the mid-ninth century. What this means is that the natural disaster statistics provided in *Samguk sagi* are not records of general meteorological or astronomical anomalies, but the incidence of those anomalies that negatively affected the production systems in Silla. Therefore, contrary to popular belief, King Seongdeok's reign was not the zenith of the Middle-period prosperity, but an era fraught with calamities, heralding the decline of Silla's fortune in times to come.

This suggests that the last seventy years of the Middle Period, namely from the reign of Seongdeok to that of Hyegong, were the toughest time for the people of Silla. In fact, life could have been harrowing for the Silla people throughout the Middle Period, if one considers the endless series of wars engaged in by the Silla rulers of this period, beginning with King Taejong Muyeol's Baekje campaign, followed by King Munmu's Goguryeo campaign and ending with the war with Tang. Though the unification of the Three Kingdoms was a soaring achievement for the rulers, what the ordinary

people of Silla probably retained from this period were the atrocities of war and devastations from natural disasters. Members of the ruling elite of Silla were also alarmed by the frequency of natural disasters. During King Gyeongdeok's reign, the recurrent natural disasters prompted Kim Sain, the Sangdaedeung at the time, to initiate a discussion of the areas in which the government fell short, if any. In the section on the reign of King Hyegong in *Samguk sagi* and *Samguk yusa*, a successive series of articles state how the government was losing the support of the people due to frequent natural disasters, to such a point that the continuance of the regime was considered to be at risk.

### Natural Disasters and Raging Epidemics

The worst part of a natural disaster, in historic times, was the famine that followed it, and the famine, in turn, gave way to epidemics, as it rendered the population as a whole prey to disease. This was exactly what happened in Silla of the eighth and ninth centuries. At that time, due to the frequent international exchanges, many of the epidemics affecting Silla's population had an exogenous origin. Silla's diplomatic exchanges and trade with Tang, Balhae and ancient Japan were most active in the eighth and ninth centuries. People and goods crossing the borders also brought with them diseases of previously unknown types. The spread of a new pathogen often had a devastating consequence on a population which had never been previously exposed to it.

In Nara of the 730s, Fujiwara no Fuhito, an influential member of Japan's imperial court, lost four of his sons one after another to smallpox. In Silla, King Seondeok succumbed to an infectious disease (*yeokjin*) in 785. Even the most powerful and wealthiest were not spared by the raging epidemics. Ordinary people, however, having no access to medical care of any sort, were the worst off and were helpless before the cruel hand they were dealt.

Records chronicling the Middle-period reigns report various measures undertaken by Silla rulers to prevent or minimize natural disasters and rein in the spread of epidemics. Grain from government warehouses was distributed to the needy and efforts to more accurately forecast weather phenomena were made by appointing Nugak doctors and astronomy doctors. The number of physicians was increased, and medical education was offered to students



Fig 19. Stone Seated Bhaisajyaguru Buddha of Samneunggok in Mt. Nam, Gyeongju

at a state level. Also, in times of emergency such as an outbreak of epidemics, medical practitioners of proven skills were hired through special channels, regardless of whether they had had formal training.

However, at a time when only rudimentary means were available to predict and control natural disasters, and the scientific knowledge of the day fell short of identifying the causes of an infectious disease, religion and occult science remained the most effective way to appease the anxiety and fear of the masses. More statues of the Medicine Buddha (S. Bhai ajyaguru; K. Yaksayeorae), to whom healing powers were attributed, were created during this period between the late eighth century and early ninth century than during any other periods. New Buddhist statues and temple bells were created in particularly large numbers during King Gyeongdeok's reign, both in and outside the capital area. The giant bell in Hwangnyongsa and the Sacred Bell of King Seongdeok in Bongdeoksa were cast. Seokguram was constructed, also at this time, with Bulguksa Temple being rebuilt. A gigantic Medicine Buddha, weighing over 300,000 *geun*, was created in Bunhwangsa as a state project. These grand Buddhist edifices and statues have long been regarded as manifestations of the cultural flourishing of the Middle Period. However, for a more complete and accurate understanding of their significance, it is necessary to recognize their function as religious means to allay the fears of the Silla people.

### Regional Instability in East Asia and the Revival of the Nogeup System

The effect of the An Lushan Rebellion (755–763) was not limited to upending the political system within Tang China. It shook the very foundations of the regional order led by Tang destabilizing Silla's monarchy as well, in the process. At that time, Silla was hit by a continuous series of natural disasters, with deadly epidemics raging throughout the country. This, in tandem with the geopolitical unrest in the region, exacerbated the sense of crisis in Silla, worsening the strife among members of its ruling elite. Amid the on-going tumult, rebellions by *jingol* aristocrats challenging the king's authority occurred more frequently. The vicious circle between natural disasters, epidemics and political turmoil had a destructive effect also on the production and

reproduction systems in Silla and seriously disrupted the finances of the state. As a result, in 757 (16th year of King Gyeongdeok's reign), the king was forced to reinstate the *nogeup* system, which had been abolished by King Sinmun.

Prior to the unification of the Three Kingdoms, *jingol* aristocrats were awarded economic interests over farmlands through this system. Under the *nogeup* system, a certain number of land units were distributed to Silla aristocrats according to their rank or post. Based on what we know, this entitled them to collect taxes on the land so received, as well as giving them certain rights over the population, such as drafting labor from villages. Under such a system, it was easy for a *jingol* aristocrat to control or rule over an entire area. After unification, during the reign of King Sinmun, the *nogeup* system was abolished in favor of the *nokbong* system. Under the *nokbong* system, taxes were collected directly by the state from all areas of the country, and government officials were given a salary drawn from the tax revenue. The advantage of the new system was that it prevented the private rule of the peasantry by aristocrats.

Although the *nogeup* system had the flaw of granting *jingol* aristocrats control over certain regions, it was an effective solution to reduce government spending, insofar as the aristocrats were individually responsible for the production and reproduction systems in areas that were their respective economic base. Silla, at its founding, was designed as an oligarchic country ruled by *jingol* aristocrats. This was a political structure of choice given the instability of the production systems of the ancient society, which remained extremely vulnerable to natural disasters. In the Middle Period, benefiting from increased tax revenues from the former territories of Goguryeo and Baekje, Silla rulers attempted to move beyond the structure as a 'federation of *jingol* aristocrats.' However, this ambition was brutally shattered by the unending series of natural disasters striking the country from the mid-eighth century, and Silla had to bow to the fundamental limitation of the ancient society it was.

### Growing Power of *Jingol* Clans

After the unification, the fortune of some *jingol* families declined, and the king's power increased commensurately. With the progress in the centralized

rule, the government had a far more effective control of land and people across Silla's territory. This was also accompanied by extensive progress in the openness of the government organization and systems. However, the importance of the *golpum* system, headed by the *jingol* nobility, as the apparatus dominating Silla's politics and society remained undiminished. Although after unification, there were more opportunities for people of the *dupum* class, those from outside the capital city or commoners to climb the social ladder, the degree of social mobility eventually declined, as peace continued in the Silla society of the Middle Period, with the monopoly over power and wealth of royal kinsmen and those in the close entourage of the king increasing. The revival of the *nogeup* system ushered in a new era in which the power base of *jingol* families grew to a yet unprecedented level.

One reads in *Xin Tangshu* an interesting passage giving a measure of the financial means of high-ranking *jingol* aristocrats of the Middle Period: "A Silla minister's household receives generous salaries from the government. A household has some 3,000 *nodong* (slaves and servants) and nearly as many weapons. Cows, horses and pigs are left to graze on islands and are killed by arrows, when their meat is needed. Silla ministers lend grain to people, and those who fail to pay back the grain are brought in and made into household slaves." This passage appears to have been quoted from *Xinhuo guoji* (Account of Silla), authored by Gu Yin, who visited Silla as an envoy of the Tang imperial court during the reign of King Hyegong (765–780).

Influential *jingol* families owned large tracts of land and livestock farms. A *jingol* aristocrat who was a close relative of the king or was recognized for notable contributions to the state was also given a *sigeup*, a special private domain awarded by the king. With the revival of the *nogeup* system in the sixteenth year of King Gyeongdeok's reign, *jingol* aristocrats came into possession of yet more vast wealth. This was precisely the situation described as the "generous salaries" received from the government. Meanwhile, the 3,000 *nodong* were the kind of manpower that could be transformed into a private army, if need arose, as weapons are said to have been available in equal number.

Silla ministers, furthermore, had their own private entourage of *mungaek* (retainers) and strategists endowed with martial or tactical expertise. In normal times, these people managed the farms of their aristocratic lords or served as their political advisors. But, in emergencies, they formed and commanded a private army for their lords. The relationship between a

*jingol* aristocrat and a *mungaek*, although formally that between a lord and a vassal, subject to the rules of the *golpum* system, seems to have also had the characteristics of a private relationship between two individuals, based upon mutually agreed terms and objectives.

Already from the Middle Ancient Period, *jingol* aristocrats had military officers that were privately recruited by them and kept on their private payroll. Jukjuk, the swordsman of Kim Pumseok, the Castellan of Daeyaseong, and the 3,000 specialist soldiers sent to Goguryeo by Kim Yusin, on a mission to rescue Kim Chunchu are the prime examples. These people were not forces mobilized by a family clan or a community, but were privately recruited by aristocratic lords. Even after a specific mission had been accomplished, they continuously maintained their relationship with their respective lords as part of the private armed forces serving the latter.

It was also not uncommon for members of local gentry or landless farmers to arrive in the capital city, in the hope of making a name for themselves or simply seeking a better life. Around the time of the unification wars, many of them became soldiers, as there was a high demand for fighting forces and frequent calls for enlistment. Others chose to serve prominent aristocrats as their private retainers. Hwarangdo, the youth training system, originally designed for the fostering of government officials, also served as a manpower pool for private military staff for aristocrats. Powerful aristocrats tapped into Hwarangdo as needed and depending on the political and military condition of the day. Kim Yusin, for instance, was not a scion of an old aristocratic clan of Silla, but a newcomer of Gaya origin, who had neither a regional base nor a clan to back him. Nonetheless, he rose to political prominence and fathered one of the most influential clans of the Middle Period, probably because he was able to successfully build a body of loyal retainers to consolidate and expand his power base.

### King Hyegong's Assassination and the Decline of the Middle Period

In addition to their own private armies, *jingol* aristocrats of the late Middle Period also appear to have enlisted local forces, based in places outside the capital city. For example, the rebellion by two aristocratic officials during

the reign of King Hyegong is described as a fight between “ninety-six top *jingol* officials (*gakgan*) of the capital city and cities and counties of the five provinces.” The Rebellion of Bidam in the Middle Ancient Period (647: 16th year of Queen Seondeok’s reign) was an insurgency that was confined to the capital area. In contrast, forces outside the capital area were involved in the Rebellion of Kim Heumdal in the early Middle Period, as indicated by the phrase in King Sinmun’s edict, “the catastrophe struck the inside and outside.” What this says is that during the Middle Period, the power of Silla aristocrats started to extend beyond the confines of Gyeongju, as they won the loyalty of various factions across the country.

It also appears that the Gyeongju aristocrats tried to gain control of the government army by placing their men in key military offices or by wooing military commanders to their camp. This was probably secondary to building their own private army, however, as the allegiance of government army officials so earned could not quite replace the loyalty they could expect from their own forces. Hence, the government troops mobilized in rebellions are most likely to have been those from outside the capital area who lent their allegiance to influential noblemen of Gyeongju on a tacit promise of sponsorship in exchange, serving as a private militia for them.

The ruling elite of Silla also continuously expanded their wealth. Ruling aristocrats incorporated new land into their ever-growing estate through means such as mergers or land trusts. The government, in a situation where it had no choice but to revive the *nogeup* system, could do little to stop aristocrats from amassing land. As a result, a considerable number of peasants who were stripped of land became hired farmhands. Those who were yet worse off sold their children or even themselves as slaves. Despite being the backbone of Silla’s agrarian economy, its peasants were increasingly impoverished. They either struggled under the tax burden imposed by the government or slaved away in farms owned by aristocrats as bondsmen. Due to such socioeconomic conditions, many Silla peasants were forced to renounce their status as freemen and serve aristocratic households.

King Hyegong, who succeeded to King Gyeongdeok at a tender age, was too young and inexperienced to rein in the ever more demanding *jingol* aristocrats, let alone build a new order. The names given to places in the nine *ju* (provinces) by King Gyeongdeok, as a display of monarchical authority, were dropped with King Hyegong’s rise to the throne. They were once again given the old names they had had when they were the *nogeup*

of aristocrats. Although the king was amenable to the demands of *jingol* aristocrats, his authority was soon challenged overtly through the Rebellion of Daegong. In the aftermath of this event, a series of other rebellions instigated by aristocrats broke out in various places across the country, with the chaos persisting for over three years. The situation flared up into a virtual civil war where the ninety-six *gakgan* from across the country fought each other, as mentioned earlier. The fate of Silla’s monarchy was now in the hands of its *jingol* aristocrats and the outcome of the rivalrous war between their various coalitions.

Helpless in the face of persistent challenges by *jingol* aristocrats, King Hyegong, the last ruler of the Middle Period, was assassinated in 780 by Sangdaedeung Kim Yangsang and Ichon Kim Gyeongsin, who raised their own army on the pretext of quashing the Rebellion of Kim Jijeong. Kim Yangsang made himself King of Silla (King Seondeok). With this, the Middle-period dynasty, made up of rulers directly descending from King Taejong Muyeol, drew to a close, and the Late Period began.

## Chapter 2

# Inauguration of the Late Period and Subsequent Developments

Inauguration of the Late Period  
Division and Infighting among *Jingol* Aristocrats  
Coalition of *Jingol* Aristocrats  
New Philosophical and Ideological Trends

## 1

### Inauguration of the Late Period

#### Meaning of the Late Period

At the end of the ‘Record of Silla’ section of *Samguk sagi*, we find the following statement pertaining to the periodization of Silla’s history: “The people of Silla called the period from the founding ancestor to Jindeok, the twenty-eighth king, the Early Period; the eight reigns between Muyeol and Hyegong the Middle Period; and the twenty reigns between Seondeok and Gyeongsun the Late Period.” The people of Silla considered the succession to the throne of King Muyeol after Queen Jindeok and the succession of King Seondeok after King Hyegong to be epochal events in the history of Silla. The dating of the history of Silla into three periods is still in use today.

The kings in the Middle Period were all descendants of King Taejong Muyeol. On the other hand, King Seondeok and his successor King Wonseong descended from Maripgan Namul. All Silla kings from the Kim clan after King Wonseong were his direct descendants. Therefore, if the Middle Period was ruled by kings of Muyeol’s lineage, the Late Period was the era of Wonseong’s lineage.

With the unification wars drawing to their conclusion, a period of peace and stability returned to Silla. In contrast, the Late Period was rife with political unrest, and the peasantry was hard hit with poor harvests and drought. Influential local overlords, known as *bojok*, grew more and more independent

from the central government. The weakened centralized rule and gradual disintegration of the fabric of Silla's society eventually led to the division of the kingdom into three separate polities. Hence, the heyday in the Middle Period was followed by a decline in the Late Period, ultimately leading to Silla's demise.

In Buddhism, the transmission of the religion is considered to pass through three stages: the True Dharma, Semblance Dharma and the Final Dharma. The Final Dharma is the age of Dharma decline. The Silla people of the Late Period believed that they were living in an the age of the Final Dharma in other words the end time of the world. They considered the social unrest they witnessed as precisely the kind of unrest that overtakes a society in its period of decline the Final Dharma or end time. In the Silla people's own perception, the age of decline was ushered in with the shift in the kings' lineage between King Hyegong and King Seondeok; hence, the period begun in Seondeok's rule was referred to as the Late Period.

During the early part of the Late Period, there were frequent feuds between *jingol* aristocrats over the succession to the throne. This chronic infighting in the central government opened the window of opportunity for the *bojok* to strengthen their political power. Jang Bogo, for instance, was a pioneering figure in this regard. Faced with the increasing power of the *bojok*, the *jingol* aristocrats formed coalitions, seeking to subdue or quash them rather than fighting among themselves. This restored a semblance of stability in Silla. But this superficial stability was not destined to last long. In 889 (3rd year of Queen Jinseong's reign) there were massive uprisings by peasants across the country, which persisted for many years. It is against this backdrop that the Later Three Kingdoms Period was inaugurated. In 935, with King Gyeongsun's capitulation to Taejo of Goryeo, the 1,000-year-old kingdom of Silla at last met its end.

### Accession to the Throne of King Seondeok

Silla emerged victorious in the unification wars thanks to the leadership of Kings Muyeol and Munmu. This gave a serious boost to the authority of the royal family, helping King Sinmun, the next ruler, to further strengthen the monarchical rule. The power of the king, on the path of consolidation during the Middle period, reached its highest point during the reign of King Seongdeok. During the reign of his successor, King Gyeongdeok, however,

*jingol* aristocrats started to push back to recover the lost ground, challenging the monarchical authority. In the third lunar month, 757 (16th year of King Gyeongdeok's reign), they succeeded in reviving the *nogeup* system, as the king chose to appease the increasingly defiant nobility with this measure. At the same time, efforts to strengthen the king's power continued unabated. In the twelfth lunar month of the year when the king agreed to issue *nogeup* to the aristocrats, he changed the names of *ju*, *gun* and *hyeon* across the country to Chinese-style names. In 759 (18th year of King Gyeongdeok's reign), the names of government offices and job titles were also changed to Chinese-style names. These name changes were part of a larger move to shift to a Tang-style political system which was centered on the monarch.

King Gyeongdeok was succeeded by King Hyegong. The king being eight years of age at the time of the coronation, his mother, Lady Manwol, ruled the country as regent. *Jingol* aristocrats took advantage of this situation to step up their challenge to the royal authority. In the eighth lunar month, 768 (4th year of King Hyegong's reign), Daegong, together with his younger brother Daeryeom, attempted to dethrone the king. The royal palace was besieged for thirty-three days by the rebel army which was eventually subdued. According to some sources, the rebellion lasted three months, as ninety-six top officials of the central and local governments started to battle against each other. In 770 (6th year of King Hyegong's reign), Kim Yung attempted another unsuccessful coup to unseat the young king, which cost him his life. Descendants of Kim Yusin, disgruntled about their status that had been weakened by the Middle-period kings, took part in this coup.

In the ninth lunar month, 774 (10th year of King Hyegong's reign), Kim Yangsang was appointed Sangdaedeung (Chancellor). Kim Wonhun, the grandfather of Kim Yangsang was the Jungsi, the top-ranking official of the Jipsabu. Kim Hyobang, his father, was married to Lady Saso, the daughter of King Seongdeok. Being the son of King Seongdeok's daughter helped to propel Kim Yangsang to political prominence. In 764 (23rd year of King Gyeongdeok's reign), he rose to the position of Sijung (formerly Jungsi), a top office in the Jipsabu (equivalent to today's prime minister). He appears to have held this office until 768 (4th year of King Hyegong's reign). Kim Yongsang supervised the project of casting a bell later known as the Sacred Bell of King Seongdeok to commemorate the life and work of his maternal grandfather, together with Kim Ong. In 771 (7th year of King Hyegong's reign) when the bell was completed, he was the Minister of Sukjeongdae

(the department in charge of the auditing and inspection of government officials), concurrently serving as the Minister of Suseongbu (the department in charge of construction and maintenance of fortresses). Given his personal background, Kim Yangsang is likely to have been a supporter of strong monarchical rule, lending his allegiance to the king, rather than to aristocrats.

However, barely one year into his term as the Sangdaedeung, a revolt broke out, followed soon afterwards by yet another. In the sixth lunar month, 775 (11th year of King Hyegong's reign), Kim Eungeo rebelled against the royal government, and two months later, in the eighth lunar month, Yeom Sang and Jeong Mun also conspired against it. In 767 (3rd year of King Hyegong's reign), Kim Eungeo was sent to Tang China to announce the accession to the throne of Hyegong and request his investiture. After successfully completing his mission, he served as the Sijung between the tenth lunar month, 768 (4th year of King Hyegong's reign) and the twelfth lunar month, 770 (6th year of King Hyegong's reign). Yeom Sang also held the office of Sijung, from 758 (17th year of King Gyeongdeok's reign) to 760 (19th year of King Gyeongdeok's reign). It was during his term as the Sijung that the names of government offices and titles were changed to Chinese-style names. Jeong Mun was the successor to Yeom Sang as the Sijung who held this office at the time of the rebellion. These two rebellions, which occurred in 775, were instigated by the supporters of the king. They appear to have been caused by the deepening of a political divide within the royalist faction, although concrete details are not known.

After subduing the rebellions, Kim Yang-sang and his political allies took radical measures. In the first lunar month, of 776 (12th year of King Hyegong's reign), the names of all government offices and titles were changed back to their previous Silla-style names. Changes made in the names of administrative divisions such as *ju*, *gun* and *hyeon* are presumed to also have been changed back to their original names at this time. This was an overt repudiation of the Chinese assimilation policy pursued by King Gyeongdeok, which also heralded a new era in the form of the Late period of Silla. In 777 (13th year of King Hyegong's reign), Kim Yangsang launched a blistering criticism, through a petition, of the way the king ruled the country. This catapulted him into the leadership position in the anti-royalist camp.

In the second lunar month, of 780 (16th year of King Hyegong's reign), Kim Jijeong raised an armed force and laid siege to the royal palace. In the fourth lunar month, Kim Yangsang, together with Kim Gyeongsin, mounted

a counterattack, saying that wicked people in the king's entourage had to be eliminated. Kim Jijeong was killed during the armed clash, with King Hyegong and his queen also killed amid the chaos of the battle. Judging from the record that states that King Hyegong was slain by King Seondeok and Kim Yangsang (which seems to be an error for Kim Gyeongsin, Kim Yangsang being none other than King Seondeok himself), the king and the queen appear to have been killed by the followers of Kim Yangsang. Kim Juwon, a descendant of King Taejong Muyeol, seems to have also played a role in this coup.

Kim Yangsang, the tenth-generation descendant of Maripgan Namul, succeeded to the vacant throne of Silla, becoming King Seondeok. As soon as he was crowned, King Seondeok bestowed the posthumous title 'King Gaeseong' upon his late father. Only his father was posthumously made king, with his grandfathers left out of this honor. This is because he could not bring himself to remove King Seongdeok, his maternal grandfather's tablet from among the tablets of the five kings enshrined in the Omyo (Five Royal Ancestral Shrines). Hence, Omyo now accommodated a pantheon of five past kings, including King Michu, the ancestral king, King Taejong, King Munmu, King Seongdeok and King Gaeseong. It is notable that three of the five kings were Middle-period rulers.

During the reign of Seondeok, Kim Juwon, the descendant of King Muyeol, mentioned earlier, played a prominent role in the political scene. In the tenth lunar month, 777 (13th year of King Hyegong's reign), he was appointed Sijung. This is around the time when the political scene of Silla was dominated by Kim Yangsang. Although a descendant of King Muyeol, he was nevertheless an ally of Kim Yangsang, pursuing the same political goals. In 780, shortly after the coronation of King Seondeok, he resigned from his post as Sijung. However, he retained his political influence as a Sangjaesang. Kim Juwon was considered the heir apparent of King Seondeok, who did not have children of his own.

On the other hand, there was also Kim Gyeongsin, who was the chief accomplice of King Seondeok in the coup that gave the latter the throne. When Kim Yangsang was crowned, Kim Gyeongsin became the chancellor of the new government, the post previously held by Kim Yangsang under King Hyegong. Like King Seondeok, he descended from Maripgan Namul (twelfth-generation descendant). But, he was not on the top rung of the court hierarchy and was also behind Kim Juwon in the order of succession to the Silla crown.

In 784, in other words, in the fifth year of his reign, King Seondeok wanted to step down from the throne, but went back on his decision, faced

with the objections of his courtiers. In the will he left on his death bed, in the first lunar month of the following year, King Seondeok says that stepping down from the throne had been his long-standing wish. King Seondeok may have struggled to find a modus operandi to govern due to the rivalry between the two opposing factions of his court: the supporters of Kim Juwon, and those who backed Kim Gyeongsin, a potential heir to the throne who descended from Maripgan Namul. Even if the Late period was inaugurated with his accession to the throne, the influence of the Muyeol line of aristocrats was still to be reckoned with.

Marching northwards as his royal predecessors had done, King Seondeok set up a military base named Paegangjin to take control of the region to the north of Yeseong River. Tang China conceded Silla's control of the territory south of the Daedong River in 735 (34th year of King Seongdeok's reign) and from that moment Silla dispatched its main force to develop this region. A total of ten new counties (*gun*) and prefectures (*byeon*) were located in this region in 748 (7th year of King Gyeongdeok's reign) and town walls were built for six out of the ten new cities in 762 (21st year of King Gyeongdeok's reign). Building up Paegangjin, King Seondeok first dispatched a messenger to pacify the towns to the south of Paegang (Yeseong River) in 781 (2nd year of King Seondeok's reign) and let his people move to Daegokseong (Daegok Fortress, present-day Peongsan), an important waypoint to the north of Yeseong River, after promoting Daegokseong to Paegangjin in the following year. The procedure was accomplished by appointing Chesin as the Governor of the base in 783 (4th year of King Seondeok's reign).

The jurisdiction of Paegangjin later became wider toward the north and finally reached the south of the Daedong River by the setting up of Chwiseong-gu and three towns under its domination. Over 10,000 people in the region north of Hansan were brought to build Paegangjangseong, a 118 kilometer-long fortress wall in 826 (18th year of King Heondeok's reign). Silla finally seized control of the area from the north of the Yeseong River to the south of the Daedong River.

### New Royal Lineage of King Wonseong

King Seondeok had no male offspring and died without designating his successor. Kim Juwon, the first in line for the throne, was tapped for the

coronation. However, it was Kim Gyeongsin who ended up on the throne (second lunar month, 785). According to records, the stream of Bukcheon overflowed its banks, delaying the arrival at the palace of Kim Juwon, who lived north of this stream, and Kim Gyeongsin who was the first to get there was crowned the King of Silla. Some sources report that a large number of courtiers were prepared to raise Kim Juwon to the throne on the order of Queen Dowager Jeongui, the mother of King Seondeok, but Kim Gyeongsin threatened them and forced them to make him the new king. In conclusion, Kim Gyeongsin, who was below Kim Juwon in rank and also behind him in the order of succession, seized the throne using subterfuge and threats. All kings who followed thereafter were descendants of King Wonseong except for three rulers from the Bak clan in late Silla. Hence, a new royal lineage began with King Wonseong.

In the second lunar month of his inaugural year (785), King Wonseong ordered the demolition of the tombs to remove the ancestral tablets of King Seongdeok and King Gaeseong in Omyo, and to have the tablets of his grandfather (King Heungpyeong) and father (King Myeongdeok) located to Omyo, next to those of the ancestral King Michu, King Taejong and King Munmu. The tablets of Kings Taejong Muyeol and Munmu were left untouched, probably because it was too risky even for the new king to challenge the legacies of these two heroes of the unification of the Three Kingdoms. King Soseong, who later succeeded to Wonseong, also issued



Fig 1. Gwaereung Tomb (thought to be King Wonseong's Tomb)

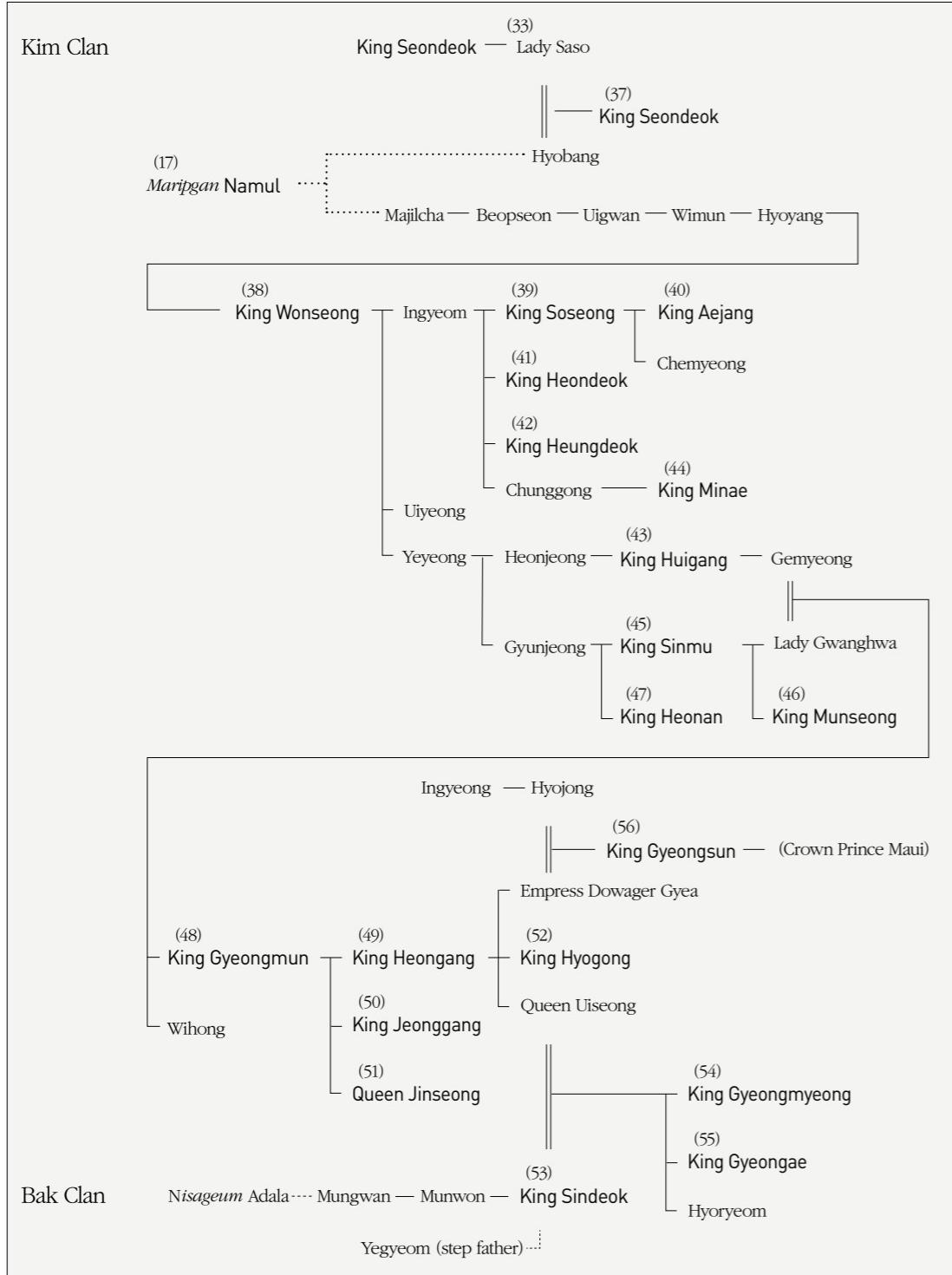


Fig 2. Genealogy of the Later Silla Kings

a posthumous title King Hyechung to his father Kim Ingyeom or Prince Hyechung. Big changes were introduced in the list of the five former kings consecrated at Omyo during the reign of King Aejang, who succeeded to Soseong. In the second lunar month, 801, the second year of his reign, King Aejang ordered the construction of new shrines for Kings Taejong and Munmu in a separate location, changing the tablets of the five kings kept in Omyo to those of the ancestral king (Michu), his great great grandfather (Myeongdeok), great grandfather (Wonseong), grandfather (Hyechung) and father (Soseong). This decision, rather than being a personal one taken by King Aejang, was taken by Kim Eonseung, who ruled as the regent. Regardless whose initiative it was, it had the effect of completely erasing the ghost of the Middle-period royal house in ancestral worship services in Silla's royal family. This overhaul of Omyo was a powerful symbolic act announcing the foundation of a new royal lineage with King Wonseong as the founding ancestor.

In the second lunar month of his inaugural year 762, King Wonseong chose Kim Ingyeom, his oldest son, as the Crown Prince. Kim Ingyeom, however, died in 791 (7th year of Wonseong's reign). Kim Uiyeong, the second son, was appointed Crown Prince during the following year, in 792. But, he also met with a death in 794 (10th year of Wonseong's reign). In 795 (11th year of Wonseong's reign), King Wonseong invested Kim Junong, the son of Kim Ingyeom, hence, a grandson of his, as Crown Prince. For Wonseong, a king who seized the throne through a coup, it was of paramount importance to hand down the throne to his descendants in a stable and normal manner by keeping the position of Crown Prince filled at all times.

In the twelfth lunar month, 798, King Wonseong passed away, and Kim Junong was crowned, becoming King Soseong. His reign, however, lasted a mere year and a half due to his death in the sixth lunar month, 800. Shortly before his passing, King Soseong invested Prince Cheongmyeong as Crown Prince. This prince, who succeeded to King Soseong, became King Aejang. Crowned king at a tender age of thirteen years, King Aejang ruled under the regency of his uncle Kim Eonseung. In 809, 9th year of King Aejang's reign, Kim Eonseung killed his nephew King Aejang and became king (King Heondeok). The rule of succession through investiture of a crown prince in the Wonseong line of Silla's royal house was thus broken at least temporarily.

In 822 (14th year of Heondeok's reign), King Heondeok bestowed the title 'Bugun,' meaning crown prince, on his younger brother Kim Sujong and had him live in Woljigung. Woljigung was one of the mansions within

the Donggung, the Palace of the Crown Prince. Kim Sujong later succeeded to the throne, becoming King Heungdeok. We find in written records a short mention, “King Heungdeok succeeded to the throne, and Crown Prince Seongang watched over the reign.” Crown Prince Seongang is Kim Chunggong. He is the younger sibling of King Heungdeok who invested him as Crown Prince, as the king had no male descendant of his own. Although not without some exceptions, the kings of the Wonseong line abided in the main by the rule in which the Crown Prince was the first in line to the throne.

King Wonseong, in tandem with choosing a crown prince, placed royal kinsmen in key positions in the government to eliminate any potential threat to the planned succession of the crown prince. Before he became the king, Kim Junong went to Tang China as a state envoy in 789 (5th year of King Wonseong's reign) and was accorded the court rank *Daeachan* upon his return. During the following year, he became the State Minister (*Jaesang*) having the rank of *Pajinchan*. Between tenth lunar month, 791 (7th year of King Wonseong's reign) and the eighth lunar month of the following year, he held the office of *Sijung* in the *Jipsabu*. In 792, he was appointed *Byeongburyeong*, an office within the Defense Ministry. Finally, in 795 (11th year of King Wonseong's reign), he was invested as Crown Prince. In Silla, officials frequently held several concurrent positions. Also in the case of Kim Junong, therefore, these various offices were probably held concurrently, rather than successively. Kim Junong appears to have served as the *Sijung*, *Byeongburyeong* and the State Minister at the same time, at one point, and later held concurrently the positions of *Byeongburyeong* and State Minister until he was appointed Crown Prince.

Kim Eonseung, his brother, had a similar political journey. In 790 (6th year of King Wonseong's reign), Kim Eonseung was also sent to Tang China as an envoy and was rewarded with the rank of *Daeachan* upon his return to Silla. In the following year, he was promoted to the rank of *Japchan* for his contribution in subduing the rebellion by Je Gong. In the second lunar month, 794 (10th year of King Wonseong's reign), he was appointed *Sijung* and held this post until the fourth lunar month, 796. Upon resigning from this post, he was appointed *Byeongburyeong*. In 795 (11th year of King Wonseong's reign), Kim Eonseung was appointed State Minister. Kim Eonseung appears to have concurrently held the posts of *Sijung* and State Minister for a time, then later, the posts of *Byeongburyeong* and State Minister.

This phenomenon of concentration of political power among close

relatives of the king persisted into later eras. After his nephew became king (King Aejang), Kim Eonseung became the secretary of *Eoryongseong*—which is a royal secretariat of sorts—on top of his position as *Sangdaedeung* (801). In 804 (5th year of King Aejang's reign), Kim Sujong was appointed *Sijung* and *Sangdaedeung* in 819 (11th year of King Heondeok). Kim Chunggong is also likely to have been a member of the political inner circle during King Aejang's reign, although no written records proving this exist. Kim Chunggong was appointed *Sijung* in the first lunar month, 817 (9th year of King Heondeok's reign) and held this office until the fourth lunar month, 821 (13th year of King Heondeok's reign). In the first lunar month, 822 (14th year of King Heondeok's reign), he succeeded his older brother Kim Sujong in the post of *Sangdaedeung*, as the latter was invested as *Bugun*. He had the practical authority over key government matters, including the decision-making power over personnel affairs. Kim Heonjeong, the son of Kim Yeyeong became *Sijung* in 807 (8th year of King Aejang's reign) and continuously held this post until the first lunar month, 810 (2nd year of King Heondeok's reign). As of 813 (5th year of King Heondeok's reign), he had the rank of *Ichan* and concurrently served as the *Guksang* (State Minister), *Byeongburyeong* and *Suseongburyeong*. As for his younger brother, Kim Gyunjeong, he held the office of *Sijung* between the spring of 812 (4th year of King Heondeok's reign) and the eighth lunar month, 814 (6th year of King Heondeok's reign). Kim Gyunjeong led the government army as the commander during the Rebellion of Kim Heonchang in 822.

The Late period was not significantly different from the previous period in terms of the political landscape. Just as with the reforms of the Five-shrine System (*Omyoje*) carried out by King Hyegong, the purpose of the reforms of the Five-shrine system carried out in the reign of King Aejang was to strengthen the authority of the monarch through conducting commemorative rites for the royal ancestors. Several kings who came after King Wonseong showed themselves anxious about the investiture of a crown prince; something that was repeatedly seen in the Middle period as well. King Simmun and King Gyeongdeok, for example, repudiated their queen consorts, who failed to provide them with a male heir, and got remarried. The monopoly over political power enjoyed by the king's close kinsmen was also a perennial pattern that existed in the Middle period. This concentration of power among the close relatives of the king aggravated the discontent of *jingol* aristocrats, who were excluded from the inner circle.

## 2

## Division and Infighting among *Jingol* Aristocrats

### Rebellion of Kim Heonchang

King Heondeok, who rose to the throne by killing his nephew, King Aejang, and Kim Chemyeong, the latter's younger brother, sought to stabilize his power base by bringing his two siblings, Kim Sujong and Kim Chunggong to the government. He was also generous in his treatment of elderly *jingol* aristocrats. In 812 (4th year of King Heondeok's reign), when Chungyeong turned seventy years of age, the king gave him a chair and a walking staff as a present. In 819 (11th year of King Heondeok's reign), Jinwon was also gifted with a chair and a walking staff, for his seventieth birthday. Moreover, Kim Heonjeong who was found ill and had difficulty walking, received a staff from King Heondeok, although not nearly seventy years of age. In the first lunar month, 823 (15th year of King Heondeok's reign) when Wonsun and Pyeongwon, who had turned seventy, asked to be relieved of their duties on the account of their great old age, the king again ordered a chair and a walking staff to be given to them. Through such respectful treatment of these senior officials of *jingol* rank, King Heondeok hoped to appease the resentment felt by *jingol* aristocrats about his having usurped the throne and the monopoly of power held by his close kinsmen. But, this could only postpone the inevitable. In the third lunar month, 822 (14th year of King Heondeok's reign), the swelling rumble of discontent erupted into a

rebellion led by Kim Heonchang, the governor of Ungcheonju.

King Wonseong, soon after his coronation, made attempts to win over Kim Juwon, the scion of King Taejong Muyeol, and his descendants. He bestowed upon Kim Juwon, his former rival in the contest for the throne, the tile 'King of Myeongju-gun,' Myeongju being the city to which he retired after his defeat in this contest. The king also gave him a number of towns in Myeongju as his domains. In 790 (6th year of King Wonseong's reign), the king appointed Kim Juwon's son, Kim Jonggi, as the Sijung.

In the first lunar month, 813 (5th year of King Heondeok's reign), Kim Heonchang, another son of Kim Juwon, was given the post of governor of Mujinju. The latter was promoted to Sijung in the eighth lunar month of the following year (6th year of King Heondeok's reign) and held this office until the first lunar month, 816 (8th year of King Heondeok's reign). Thereafter, he was again assigned to a post outside the capital area. After serving as the governor of Cheongju, in the fourth lunar month, 821 (13th year of King Heondeok's reign), he became the governor of Ungcheonju. It was rather unusual for someone who had already held the post as a local governor and was subsequently promoted to Sijung to again serve as a local governor; and this, for six years. This mistreatment by the king, keeping him at the periphery of the political inner circle, was probably the direct cause of Kim Heonchang's uprising in 822.

Kim Heonchang proclaimed the founding of a new nation that he called "Jangan" and chose a new era name, "Gyeongun." He tried to bring under his control four *ju*—Mujinju, Wansanju, Cheongju and Sabeolju—and several cities and counties—including Gugwongyeong, Seowongyeong, and Geumgwangyeong—by threatening their governors and magistrates. Faced with this threat, Hyangyeong, the governor of Cheongju, fled to Chuhwagun (present-day Miryang). Meanwhile, in other places like Hansanju, Uduju, Samnyangju, Paegangjin and Bugwongyeong, defenses were bolstered in anticipation of rebel attacks.

Upon learning about this situation, King Heondeok started by ordering the reinforcement of the bulwarks of the capital city, with troops dispatched to counter the rebels shortly thereafter. The advance party led by Jang Ung headed out of the capital city first, followed by troops led by Wigong and Jereung and finally, Samgun, the main forces, commanded by Kim Gyunjeong, Ungwon and Kim Ujing. Kim Chunggong and Yun Eung were ordered to defend the Munhwagwanmun (present-day Oedong-myeon,

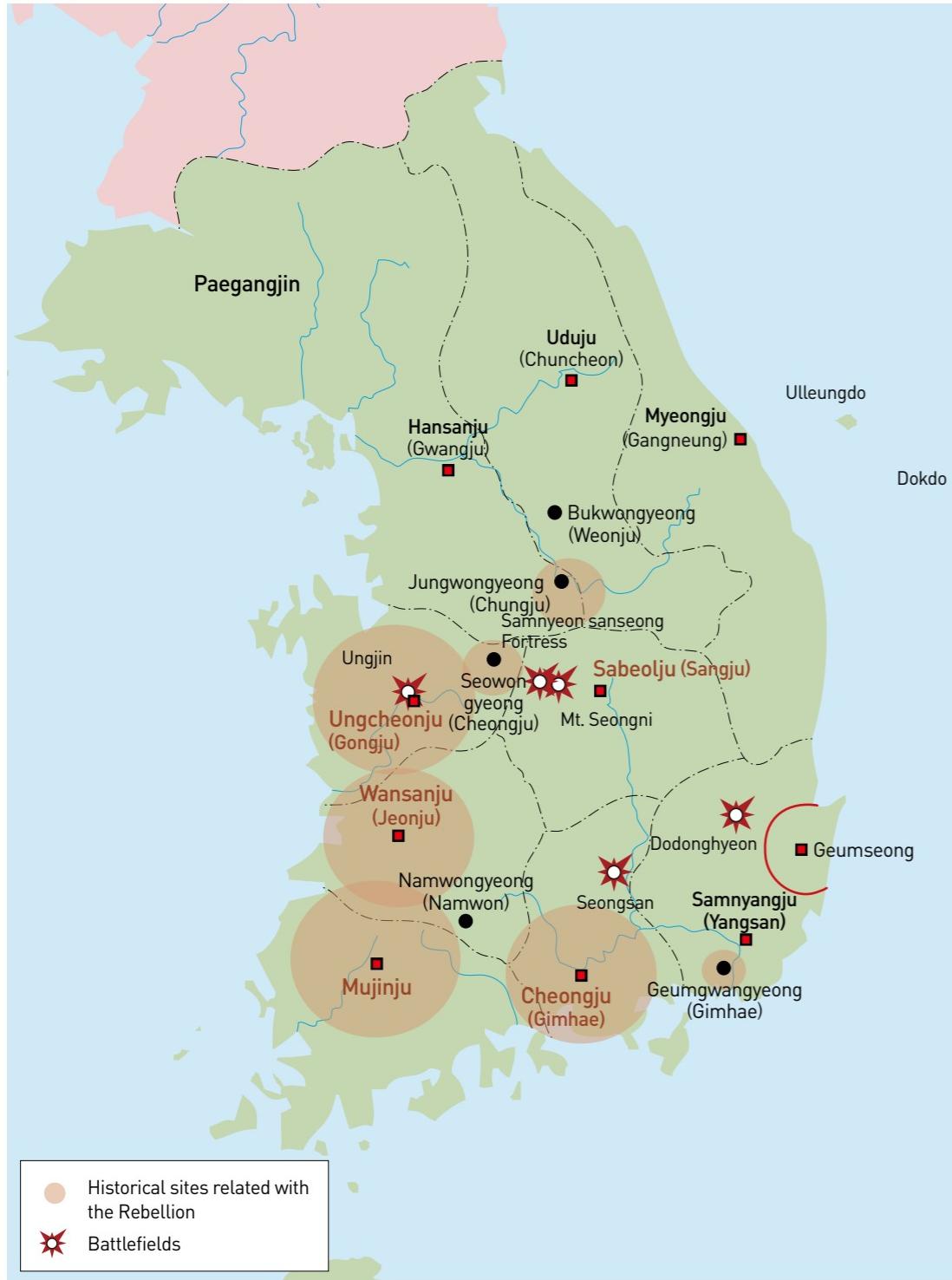


Fig 3. Historical sites and battlefields related with the Rebellion of Kim Heonchang

Gyeongju). The *Hwarang* youth also joined forces with the government troops, with Myeonggi and Allak at their command. The government forces, after a score of victories against the rebels, gathered later in Ungjinseong (present-day Gongju), the latter's base, and mounted a siege for some ten days. Kim Heonchang took his own life shortly before the city fell to the government forces. A total of 239 co-conspirators of Kim Heonchang, including his family clan members, lost their life in the aftermath of this event.

In the first lunar month, 825 (17th year of King Heondeok's reign), Beommun, the son of Kim Heonchang, conspired with Susin, a brigand from Mt. Godal (present-day Yeoju) and some one hundred other people to overthrow the king. Kim Beommun, as he planned to make Pyeongyang (present-day Yangju) the new capital city, launched an attack on Bukhansanju. The rebels were quashed by the city's governor Chongmyeong.

Both attempts at overthrowing the monarchy, once by Kim Heonchang himself and another by his son, failed. Although ultimately they both failed, the significance of these attempts was not negligible. Kim Heonchang cited the throne stolen from his father, Kim Juwon, the legitimate claimant, as the reason for his revolt. Therefore, the Rebellion of Kim Heonchang was an attempt to win back the throne on the part of the Muyeol line of royal descendants.

To counter the come-back to power of the Muyeol line, the members of the Wonseong royal line formed a coalition. Kim Sujong, who was made Bugun shortly before Kim Heonchang's rebellion, for instance, was the highest commander of the government forces mobilized to quash the rebels. Kim Chunggong also joined this battle against the rebels. Meanwhile, Kim Gyunjeong, a scion of Prince Yeyeong, and his son, Kim Ujing, led the main army unit deployed for this battle. Jereung, who is said to have joined the advance party, is likely to have been the same person as Kim Jeryung, the son of Kim Heonjeong.

On the other hand, royal family members belonging to Kim Juwon's camp failed to join forces. The Kim Jonggi branch refrained from participating in the rebellion and instead helped the royal family members of the King Wonseong line. For this reason, the rebellions had no adverse consequences on members of the Kim Jonggi branch, who were left unscathed politically. However, these failed rebellions marked the end of the road for royal family members of the King Muyeol line. The Wonseong line now had the sole claim to the throne.

During King Heondeok's reign, life in the countryside changed for the worse. The peasants were so impoverished that some of them left their hometown for far-away China and Japan in their foraging for food. Kim Heonchang was probably well aware of this situation. Thus, he built support for his plan to create a new nation on the back of the discontent of the peasantry with the central government. No other rebellion in Silla before Kim Heonchang's revolt had ever challenged its legitimacy as a state or threatened its very existence. The king and the central government therefore emerged weakened from this event, with their authority and credibility hard hit. The central government's control over the provinces suffered as a result, leaving opportunities for local overlords to grow powerful. Kim Heonchang's rebellion was thus a precursor to what was to come later; namely, new kingdoms founded by Gyeon Hwon (Later Baekje) and Gungye (Later Goguryeo).

### Political Reforms

One of the top priorities for King Heungdeok, who succeeded to King Heondeok, was to minimize the after-effect of Kim Heonchang's rebellion. So the king sought to repair the fracture the rebellion caused in Silla's *jingol* nobility through policies promoting reconciliation between the various factions. The king appointed to key government posts the descendants of Kim Jonggi, who had had no involvement in the rebellions of the Muyeol royal line. Kim Heun, the grandson of Kim Jonggi, after returning from Tang China where he had gone in 822 (14th year of King Heondeok's reign) in the capacity of a state envoy and as a *sugwi* scholar (a Silla scholar studying in China), served successively as the Magistrate of Namwon and Governor of Gangju before becoming a State Minister. Meanwhile, Kim Yang, another grandson of Kim Jonggi, began his career in 828 (3rd year of King Heungdeok's reign) as the Magistrate of Goseong-gun and was later appointed as the Daeyun of the local capital city, Jungwonsogyeong, then the Governor of Muju. Kim Yusin also appears to have posthumously been made king (King Heungmu) during the reign of King Heungdeok, although according to some, this event would have occurred during King Gyeongmyeong's rule. At any rate, all these actions were part of an effort to win over the descendants of Kim Yusin.

King Heungdeok also tried to give a new boost to the monarchy whose authority and credibility had been heavily undermined by the Rebellion of Kim Heonchang. Just as his predecessors had done, King Heungdeok placed his close relatives in key government posts. His brother, Kim Chunggong, was brought onboard to assist his rule. Kim Gyunjeong, meanwhile, was appointed Sangdaedeung in the second lunar month, 835 (10th year of King Heungdeok's reign). Kim Ujing, the son of Kim Gyunjeong, was given the post of Sijung in the first lunar month, 828 (3rd year of King Heungdeok's reign) and held this office until the first lunar month, 831 (6th year of King Heungdeok's reign). He was again called upon to serve as the Sijung three years later, in the first lunar month, 834 (9th year of King Heungdeok's reign), but resigned from the post when his father was appointed Sangdaedeung. Upon his resignation, King Heungdeok ordered the post to be filled by Kim Myeong, the son of Kim Chunggong. At the same time as appointing his cousin, Kim Gyunjeong, Sangdaedeung, the king installed his nephew, Kim Myeong, as the Sijung. By placing the descendants of both Kim Yeyeong and Kim Ingyeom in key positions in the government, King Heungdeok attempted to achieve a balance of power between these two branches.

Much like the kings of the Middle period, the kings of the Wonseong line also worked to strengthen the rule of law, based on Confucianism. King Wonseong implemented a new recruitment system called *Dokseo sampum gwa* in 788, the 4th year of his reign. King Soseong, in the year of his inauguration (799), assigned Georo-hyeon of Cheongju (present-day Jinju) to the students of the Gukhak (Royal Academy).

In the eighth lunar month, 805 (6th year of King Aejang's reign), King Aejang enacted some twenty legal provisions. At this time, the titles of the heads and assistant heads of the Wihwabu, the personnel department, and the seongjeon (management offices of Buddhist temples patronized by the royal family) of Sacheonwangsa and those of other temples were changed to Chinese-style names. Concretely, native-style names such as Geumhasin or Sangdang were replaced by names ending in 'yeong' or 'gyeong.' The number of low-ranking officers of the Yejakbu (Ministry of Construction) and other various ministries and departments was reduced as well, at this time. All these measures were related to the twenty legal provisions.

King Aejang restricted the prevalence of Buddhism in 806 (7th year of his reign). Under the king's order, construction of new temples and

use of luxurious items during Buddhist rituals were prohibited to prevent dissipation of wealth caused by the prevalence of newly built temples and extravagant rituals frequently undertaken by the *jingol* aristocrats and the royal family at that time. In 808, the king dispatched his messengers along twelve routes and clarified the borders among villages and towns along their routes. Historians assume that this was intended to strengthen the grasp of the central government over the countryside by clarifying administrative districts, though how the government specifically did this is still unknown.

King Heungdeok also looked into legislative changes as part of an overhaul of government systems. For example, in the text found engraved on a fragment of the grave stele belonging to King Heungdeok's tomb, we read the phrase “*Gyeoksik sigae*” (格式是皆), suggesting that there was either the compilation of a book of protocols or a revision of an existing one. However, no details related to this event are currently known. Also of note in this regard is the fact that Jipsabu was renamed “Jipsaseong” in 829 (4th year of King Heungdeok's reign). According to some researchers, Jipsabu was renamed Jipsaseong, as a result of the growing power of this ministry. Whatever the background to this change, it was to emulate the Tang system comprising ‘*three seong*’, whose larger goal was to strengthen the power of the monarch. We must keep in mind that when the names of government offices and titles were changed into Chinese-style names at an earlier time—in other words, 759 (18th year of King Gyeongdeok's reign)—the goal had also been to consolidate royal power.

Moreover, King Heungdeok attempted to introduce changes into Silla's social class system. In 834 (9th year of King Heungdeok's reign), he issued an edict containing the following statement: “Everyone in human societies has their own place. Some are more elevated than others in status, some are humble folk. People have different titles and etiquette and manners, as well as are dressed differently according to their social stations. However, today, as mores deteriorate, everyone indulges in an immoderate and extravagant lifestyle. They worship rare foreign goods and look down upon coarse local goods. This has undermined etiquette and manners in our country, and our culture is on the verge of complete destruction.” This was indeed a time when there was a great deal of laxity in the *golpum* system and its associated code of conduct, and the aristocrats lived a lavish lifestyle. The primary purpose of this edict was clearly to encourage restraint and moderation among people belonging to the ruling class. In the

‘Miscellaneous’ section (*Japji*) of *Samguk sagi* can be found the specific restrictions related to clothes, vehicles and horses, dishes and housing placed on each of the social classes below the *jingol* class—namely, the six, five and four-*dupum* (*dupum* literally meaning ‘head-rank’), *pyeongin* (ordinary people) or *baekseong* (common people).

The political agenda behind this edict by King Heungdeok is interpreted in various different ways. For some, it was simply a move to regulate the mores of Silla society; for others, its purpose was to re-examine the tribal clans that formed the basic social units of the *golpum* system or to politically re-organize the various clans based in outer provinces. Yet another interpretation is that this edict was intended to forge an image of the king as a transcendental being with a lofty status similar to that of the emperor of China. In other words, by urging moderation among the aristocrats, the



Fig 4. Tomb of King Heungdeok, Gyeongju

edict implicitly declared the king and the royal family to be superior to the latter. In this sense, the edict is not unrelated to the move of renaming the Jipsabu as Jipsaseong which had a similar effect of aggrandizing the king and his authority.

### Battles for Crown

King Heondeok, who did not have a male descendant, chose his brother, Kim Sujong, as the heir to his throne. A similar decision was taken by King Heungdeok, who also appointed his younger sibling, Kim Chunggong, Crown Prince in the absence of a son. But Kim Chunggong appears to have met a premature demise sometime in the second lunar month, 835 (10th year of King Heungdeok's reign). Upon the death of Kim Chunggong, King Heungdeok appointed his cousin, Kim Gyunjeong, to the post of Sangdaedeung. Although not exactly an investiture as a crown prince, given the circumstances, his appointment as the Sangdaedeung was tantamount to being designated as the heir to the throne. There was of course Kim Myeong, the son of Kim Chunggong, who certainly was one of the potential claimants to the throne. But, Kim Myeong, nineteen years of age at that time, lacked political experience and clout. In comparison, Kim Gyunjeong had already held the post of Sijung during King Heondeok's reign and was one of the heroes in the quashing of Kim Heonchang's rebellion. No other kinsmen of King Heungdeok came near Kim Gyunjeong in terms of political caliber and credentials. However, King Heungdeok appointed Kim Myeong as the Sijung to check Kim Gyunjeong's political power.

King Heungdeok passed away during the eleventh year of his reign, in the twelfth lunar month, 836, at sixty years of age. His will, in which he expressed the wish to be buried in the tomb of his queen who predeceased him, contained no mention of a successor. In this situation, it seemed to all only natural for Kim Gyunjeong to succeed to the throne. Now crowned as the king of Silla, Kim Gyunjeong took up residence in Jeokpan Palace, accompanied by his son, Kim Ujong and his supporters including Yejing and Kim Yang (who was a descendant of Kim Juwon), where his safety was ensured by a private army. But, this succession was met with a strong protest by Kim Myeong who instead wanted to see Kim Jeryung, the nephew of Kim Gyunjeong and his own brother-in-law, on the throne. Kim

Myeong succeeded in bringing Ihong and Bae Hwonbaek into his camp. Kim Myeong and Ihong brought troops to Jeokpan Palace and besieged it. During the armed clash that ensued, Kim Gyunjeong was killed, and Kim Yang, injured by an arrow, fled along with Kim Ujing. The battle ended with the victory of Kim Myeong and his followers, handing the throne to Kim Jeryung who later became known as King Huigang.

Without delay the new king appointed Kim Myeong as the Sangdaedeung and Ihong as the Sijung. The de facto ruler meanwhile, was Kim Myeong. Kim Ujing, after the defeat in the battle for the throne, spread resentful rumors. But, seeing the ire of Kim Myeong, he feared retaliation and fled to Cheonghaejin in the fifth lunar month, 837 (2nd year of King Huigang's reign). In the fourth lunar month, 828 (3rd year of King Heungdeok's reign) when the government issued Jang Bogo permission to set up the military complex in Cheonghaejin, Kim Ujing was the Sijung. Therefore, the two men must have developed special ties, and this was probably the reason why Kim Ujing took refuge in Cheonghaejin. Yejing soon followed suit to join Kim Ujing in Cheonghaejin, accompanied by Yangsun.

In the first lunar month, 838 (3rd year of King Huigang's reign), Kim Myeong mounted a coup with Ihong as his accomplice. He forced King Huigang to take his own life and became king; hence, King Minae. In the second lunar month of the same year, Kim Yang raised troops and discussed a plan to overthrow King Minae with his allies in Cheonghaejin. The news that King Minae had usurped the throne was a boon for Kim Ujing and his followers who were able to build support for their long-awaited revenge. Kim Ujing asked Jang Bogo for troops, calling Minae an enemy who had slain his father and a traitor who had killed the king. Jang Bogo put 5,000 soldiers at the disposal of Kim Ujing, with Jeong Nyeon, his longtime friend, in command.

The coalition forces of Kim Ujing's and Jang Bogo's armies, with Kim Yang in supreme command, inflicted defeats on the government troops in two consecutive battles in the first lunar leap month, 835. The coalition forces advanced to the capital city, killing King Minae. Kim Ujing became the new king in the fourth lunar month, 835, later known as King Sinmu. King Sinmu, before he rose to the throne, had proved his valor as a general during the Rebellion of Kim Heonchang. He had considerable experience in the government as well, having served as the Sijung twice. However, King Sinmu died some six months into his reign in the seventh lunar month, 835, before he had the chance to put his experience to the service of the

kingdom.

The fierce battles for the throne that ensued after the death of King Heungdeok were fought between the various branches within the King Wonseong line. In other words, the war was, on the one hand, between the descendants of the two sons of King Wonseong—the Kim Ingyeom branch (Kim Myeong who became King Minae) and the Kim Yeyeong branch (Kim Gyunjeong)—and on the other, between the branches of the two sons of Kim Yeyeong—the Kim Heonjeong branch (Kim Jeryung who became King Huigang) and the Kim Gyunjeong branch (Kim Ujing who became King Sinmu). Making the web of allegiance more complicated, Kim Yang, the descendant of Kim Juwon sided with Kim Gyunjeong and King Sinmu, while Kim Heun joined King Minae's camp.

The *golpum* system was such that the descendants of *jingol* aristocrats inherited their ancestors' social rank, except in rare cases in which an individual was disqualified for special reasons and stripped of his or her inborn rights. This is one reason why the number of *jingol* aristocrats continuously increased over the course of Silla's existence, even though some families died out naturally or from a political downfall. As the pool of aristocrats expanded, such groups as the *jingol* class or the Muyeol or Wonseong line were simply too large for their members to feel a strong sense of affiliation or solidarity. Hence, the extended clans were replaced by families as a unit whose members actually shared a common goal and had strong ties to each other. This trend was further accelerated when direct-line heirs were given priority in the order of succession, after the Omyo system became firmly established. The royal family, as well as influential *jingol* family clans, branched into smaller groups that functioned effectively as social and political units.

One thing that deserves attention in these battles for the throne is the mobilization of private armies of *jingol* aristocrats. The so-called *jokbyeong* [clan army] that served as the personal guard to Kim Gyunjeong is a case in point. The troops used by Kim Jeryung and Kim Myeong also are likely to have been private armies. Also, according to some historians, the *Hwarang* group, led by Myeonggi and Annak, who joined forces with government troops during the Rebellion of Kim Heonchang, would also have been a private army of sorts. When the battle concluded with the victory of the government forces, and 239 rebels were executed, including Kim Heonchang's family members and relatives, a substantial number of them

must have been soldiers of the private army.

Influential *jingol* aristocrats of Unified Silla possessed colossal wealth. About this topic, a Chinese record reports, "A Minister's household benefited from generous compensations. A household had some 3,000 boy servants and nearly as many suits of armor, weapons, cows, horses and pigs. These animals are left to graze on hills on an island offshore and are killed with arrows when their meat is needed." If the aristocrats indeed owned some 3,000 suits of armor and weapons, this means that they had an equal number of private troops. Either the boy servants were armed and enlisted as fighting forces, when the need arose, or a private army was formed from displaced people. Powerful *jingol* families had at their disposal a large contingent of private soldiers, as they possessed vast financial resources in the form of large salaries, farms or stock farms. It was these private soldiers who fought in the battles for the throne.

## 3

## Coalition of *Jingol* Aristocrats

### Emergence of Jang Bogo

Sometime in the early ninth century, Jang Bogo left his hometown to travel to Tang China where he became a Junior General of the Wuning District in Xuzhou (present-day Jiangsu Province). The Wuning District was the main unit of Xuzhou's army, and a junior General was a high-ranking official, having 1,000 troops under his command. The Wuning District served as the vanguard during the military campaign against Li Shidao, the Governor of Pinglu Circuit (Shandong). It is during this campaign that Jang Bogo was noted for his valor, which allowed him to rapidly climb the ladder of the military hierarchy in Tang China.

The defeat of Li Shidao in February 819 put an end to the resistance of local governors to the imperial government. Later, as part of an armament reduction plan, the Tang government downsized the contingent of soldiers under the command of local governors. It was during this process that Jang Bogo seems to have left the Wuning District. Japanese records show evidence that Jang Bogo traded with the Hakata region in around 824. After leaving the Wuning District, Jang Bogo therefore appears to have been engaged in maritime trade across the Yellow Sea.

After the An Lushan Rebellion, Li Zhengji and his descendants ruled over Shandong Province for fifty-five years. Aside from their primary role as the

Governor of Pinglu Circuit, the Li family was in charge of overseeing maritime trade with Silla and Balhae, which gave them a virtual monopoly over trade conducted between both sides of the Yellow Sea. In 819, the downfall of Li Shidao brought an end to Li Zhengji's clan's dominance, giving way to private trade. Jang Bogo, as he served in the Wuning District and was privy to this development, appears to have seized the opportunity to engage in trade. The Shandong peninsula was at that time an important bridge that connected the Korean peninsula and the Japanese archipelago to continental China. This region was frequently traveled through by envoys of various countries as well as civilians. Silla people, in particular, had their own district there, known as Silla-bang. Jang Bogo's trade operation was based in this Silla district in the Shandong peninsula.

In 828 (3rd year of King Heungdeok's reign), Jang Bogo returned to Silla and submitted to the king the proposal to set up Cheonghaejin, a maritime garrison on Wando Island. Bringing the king's attention to the pirates that were the scourge of the Yellow Sea, Jang Bogo promised that he would stop the pirates from kidnapping Silla people and selling them as slaves should the king allow Cheonghaejin to be set up. King Heungdeok granted Jang Bogo's wish, bestowing upon him the title Daesa and making 10,000 soldiers available for the garrison. After the establishment of Cheonghaejin, the pirates ravaging of the southwestern coastal areas of the Korean peninsula disappeared completely. According to Chinese records, the kidnapping of Silla people by pirates was no longer seen from the Taihe Era (827–835; Tang Emperor Wenzong's reign), which corresponds to King Heungdeok's rule of Silla.

However, it seems implausible that at that time Silla's government had the means to afford to send 10,000 troops to Jang Bogo. What could have happened instead is that the king vested him with the authority to draft 10,000 inhabitants of Wando Island for his purposes. Meanwhile, Wando is believed to have been the hometown of Jang Bogo. In this case, it is also possible that Jang Bogo had already built his own forces in Wando and asked the king for an ex post facto approval. At any rate, the garrison of Cheonghaejin appears to have been Jang Bogo's private army, rather than an official army. Also of note is the title Daesa which was unprecedented as the title of a government officer of Silla. The commander of a borderland or coastal garrison was called *Dusangdaegam* or *Jindu*. The title Daesa therefore is considered an indication of the exceptional status of Jang Bogo.



Fig 5. Cheonghaejin Site in Wando Island

and equally exceptional nature of Cheonghaejin.

Jang Bogo also accumulated a considerable amount of wealth through maritime trade. He traded with Tang China through delegates known as Daedang maemulsa. Jang Bogo's trade ships, known as Gyogwanseon, called at such ports as Dengzhou, Wendeng and Chishan of Qingning. Their itinerary also included southern coastal cities like Yangzhou in Jiangsu

Province. Yangzhou was at that time a thriving center of international trade, frequently visited by Southeast Asian and Arab merchants. Jang Bogo was engaged in entrepôt trade, buying exotic goods from these international merchants and reselling them to Silla and Japan for profit. The trade delegation sent by Jang Bogo to Japan was known as Hoeyeoksa. He set up local trade headquarters in Hakata Bay, trading at times directly with Japanese government officials. The Chinese goods procured through Jang Bogo that the Japanese called Tokoku kamotsu were highly popular, in spite of their exorbitant prices.

Moreover, Jang Bogo was a great benefactor to Kim Ujing and had offered decisive help in the latter's becoming King Sinmu. Jang Bogo was generously rewarded for his help with the title 'Gamuigunsa' and domains comprising 2,000 households. Munseong, the successor to Sinmu, also showed himself grateful for Jang Bogo's role in securing the throne for the latter, issuing him a letter of appreciation shortly after his coronation. King Munseong made him a General (*Jinbae janggun*) and offered him a costume for this new position. Before this appointment, the Kim Ujing asked Jang Bogo to assist him in his accession to the throne, promising in exchange to marry the latter's daughter. To make good on his promise, in the third lunar month, 845 (7th year of King Munseong's reign), the king expressed his wish to wed Jang Bogo's daughter to his court. However, the courtiers objected, saying, "Gungbok (Jang Bogo) is a man from an island. How can we make the daughter of such a man the queen of the kingdom?" This swayed King Munseong to go back on his promise. Jang Bogo, greatly angered by King Munseong's breach of promise, plotted a rebellion. However, he was killed in the spring of 846 (8th year of King Munseong's reign) by an assassin sent by the king. With the death of Jang Bogo, Silla's government shut down the Cheonghaejin garrison in the second lunar month, 851 (13th year of King Munseong's reign) and relocated all inhabitants to Byeokgol-gun (present-day Gimje).

There are different theories concerning the exact date of Jang Bogo's death. Unlike in the Korean records, in the Japanese records, Jang Bogo is reported to have died in the eleventh lunar month, 841. This record provides a hint that the dispute over the marriage of Jang Bogo's daughter and his rebellion may have happened before this time. Also interesting is the record that states that in the third lunar month, 842 (4th year of King Munseong's reign), the daughter of Kim Yang became the queen consort to King Munseong. In other words, Kim Yang who, along with Jang Bogo, helped hand

the throne to King Sinmu, double-crossed Jang Bogo. Kim Yang seemed to be the most vocal of the objectors to the king's marriage to Jang Bogo's daughter and seemingly had the king marry his own daughter instead later on.

Should Jang Bogo's daughter have become the queen consort to Munseong, this would obviously have further increased his political influence, making him a visible member of the inner power circle of the central government. As Jang Bogo was a native of a remote island, the *jingol* aristocrats of the capital city, Geumseong (present-day Gyeongju), heavily prejudiced against those from outside the capital area, were intent on barring his entry to the central government at all costs. Besides, the *golpum* system itself was a device designed to lock in privileges for the people of the capital city. In that sense, Jang Bogo should be remembered not just as the "The Trade Prince of Maritime Commercial Empire" or the King of the Sea, but also as one who was from outside the capital area and stood up against the injustice of the *golpum* system to challenge the *jingol* nobility of Geumseong.

The battles for the Silla throne in the late 830s claimed the lives of Gyunjeong, the heir apparent, as well as two kings, Huigang and Minae over the span of barely three years. The royal palace and the capital city as a whole became a battlefield. The successor to the throne was finally decided by Jang Bogo, a local warlord. As a result, the central government's control over its territory was severely undercut. Even though Jang Bogo's bid ultimately failed, other local overlords emerged thereafter in various places across the country. This being a threat against the interests of the *jingol* nobility as a whole, the latter formed a coalition of sorts to counter the growth of local power groups.

### Coalition of the Kim Gyunjeong and Kim Heonjeong Lines

When King Sinmu passed away six months into his reign, In 839 Kim Gyeongeung succeeded him on the throne (King Munseong). King Munseong brought into his new government Kim Yang, a close ally to his father Kim Ujing during the latter's contention for the throne, appointing him to the post of Changbureong with the rank of Sopan. Early in the following year (first lunar month, 840; 2nd year of King Munseong's reign), he appointed Yejing Sangdaedeung, Uijong Sijung and Yangsun Ich'an. He, therefore, filled the new government with the chief allies of his father King Sinmu.

Peace, however, was not in sight for the kingdom of Silla, which seemed as though it was caught in an extended aftermath of the earlier battles for the throne. Jang Bogo's rebellion, even if it had ultimately been aborted by his assassination, was a case in point. Otherwise, Hongpil was caught conspiring against the Crown in 841 (3rd year of King Munseong's reign) and fled to the island. In 847 (9th year of King Munseong's reign), Yangsun, one of the top contributors in raising Kim Ujing (King Sinmu) to the throne, unsuccessfully attempted to overthrow the king with his accomplice, Heungjong, for which he was to pay with his life. In 849 (11th year of King Munseong's reign), Kim Sik and Daeheun were also caught conspiring against the king and were put to death. During King Minae's short-lived reign, Daeheun led government forces to fight the coalition forces of Kim Ujing and Jang Bogo.

King Munseong sought to negotiate with the various branches of the King Wonseong line to achieve peace. This began with the political marriage between Kim Gyemyeong, the son of King Huigang, and Lady Gwanghwa, King Munseong's sister. The wedding took place circa 840; in other words, around the time of King Munseong's coronation. Based on the timing, the marriage might have been arranged by King Sinmu. In any case, this points to some sort of reconciliation between the opposing camps of *jingol* aristocrats; namely, the Kim Gyunjeong line, Kim Heonjeong line.

Later, in the eighth lunar month, 847 (9th year of King Munseong's reign) when King Munseong invested his son as Crown Prince, he appointed Kim Yang Sijung, making the latter also serve concurrently as Byeongbureong. In the summer of 848 (10th year of King Munseong's reign), Kim Yang resigned from the office of Sijung, with Kim Gyemyeong succeeding him in the post. In 849 (11th year of King Munseong's reign), Uijeong was appointed Sangdaedeung. Uijeong, an uncle of King Munseong, was the same person as Kim Uijeong who later succeeded his nephew to become King Heonan. In the later part of King Munseong's reign, Sangdaedeung Kim Uijeong (Kim Gyunjeong line), Sijung Kim Gyemyeong (Kim Heonjeong's line) and Byeongbureong Kim Yang (a retainer of merit and a maternal relative of the king) managed a balance of sorts among themselves.

In the eleventh lunar month, 852 (14th year of King Munseong's reign), the crown prince died at a young age. In the eighth lunar month, 857 (19th year of King Munseong's reign), Kim Yang died. A top ally of King Sinmu,

Kim Yang was King Munseong's father-in-law as well as his right-hand man. The king was grief-stricken and ordered a grand funeral that was as similarly stately as the one held for Kim Yusin. Kim Yang's death seems to have been a great shock for King Munseong, who died a month later.

King Munseong left a will designating his uncle, Kim Uijeong, as his successor. Kim Uijeong was crowned in accordance with the wishes of the deceased monarch, becoming King Heonan (857). In King Munseong's will, Kim Uijeong is said to have aided the king in his governing duty as a longtime minister. At the time of Munseong's passing, Kim Uijeong was the Chancellor (Sangdaedeung). Meanwhile, judging from the record that described him and Kim Yang as the Ministers of the North and South, Uijong who was appointed Sijung in 840 (2nd year of King Munseong's reign) was also possibly Kim Uijeong. Another noteworthy fact is that King Heonan was the symbol of the alliance between the two branches of King Wonseong's descendants; in other words, the Kim Ingyeom and Kim Yeyeong branches. King Heonan was related to Kim Gyunjeong and Kim Yeyeong on his father's side and to Kim Chunggong and Kim Ingyeom on his mother's side. As soon as he was crowned, King Heonan designated Kim An as his successor to the post of Sangdaedeung. Given the absence of a mention about a new Sijung, Kim Gyemyeong must have retained this post.

King Heonan married his daughter to Kim Eungnyeom, the son of Kim Gyemyeong. Kim Eungnyeom was a *hwarang*. In the ninth lunar month, 860 (4th year of King Heonan's reign), he attended a banquet hosted in the royal palace. There, he was asked by King Heonan the question whether in his travels around the country, he had met people of virtue. Kim Eungnyeom answered, saying that he had met three types of virtuous people; persons with an elevated social position who were humble nonetheless, persons who were frugal despite possessing great wealth and powerful persons who avoided showing off their power. This answer impressed the king who thought highly of him and decided to make him his son-in-law. The marriage further cemented the alliance between the Kim Gyunjeong branch and the Kim Heonjeong branch.

King Heonan met his demise in the first lunar month, 861 (5th year of King Heonan's reign) and was succeeded by his son-in-law, Kim Eungnyeom. In King Heonan's will, in which he designated Kim Eungnyeom as his successor, one reads, "I unfortunately have only two daughters and no son. In the past, our kingdom had two queens, Seondeok



Fig 6. Sarira Container of the King Minae's Stone Pagoda in Donghwasa Temple, Daegu



Fig 7. Engraved Gilt-bronze Plaques from the Nine-story Wooden Pagoda of Hwangnyongsa Temple Site in Gyeongju

and Jindeok. But, this is not a precedent one should follow, and Silla shall not have a petticoat government. My son-in-law, Eungnyeom, although young, has tact and judgment beyond his years." King Heonan was himself designated as the successor to his nephew, King Munseong, through the latter's will. Thereafter, the testament of a preceding king became accepted as the legitimate means for transfer of power, unless a king was succeeded by his own son. It is also through this means that King Jeonggang was succeeded by Queen Jinseong. In Queen Jinseong's case, she appointed her nephew Kim Yo as Crown Prince and transferred power to him through the abdication order that was close in nature to a final will.

With King Gyeongmun rising to power, the royal line shifted from the Kim Gyunjeong branch to the Kim Heonjeong branch. King Gyeongmun resorted to Buddhism to promote reconciliation and cooperation between the various branches of the royal line of King Wonseong. In 862 (2nd year of King Gyeongmun's reign), the king drew up a plan to construct Goksa, a Buddhist temple to pray for the peace of the soul of King Wonseong. Although the actual construction of the temple was delayed and began three years later, its purpose was unquestionably to bring together the descendants of King Wonseong and help them rise above their differences. The king also had a stone pagoda erected outside the votive shrine in Donghwasa Temple to commemorate King Minae (10th day of the ninth lunar month, 863; 3rd year of King Gyeongmun's reign). Later, in the fifth lunar month, 870 (10th year of King Gyeongmun's reign), a pair of stone pagodas were erected in Borimsa Temple, also on the initiative of the king. These two pagodas were said to have been constructed in order to insure the King Heonan's rebirth in Paradise. These stone pagodas bore the hope of King Gyeongmun for reconciliation and peace between the royal family members of the Kim Gyunjeong line and the Kim Ingyeom line.

In the first lunar month of the eleventh year of his reign (871), King Gyeongmun ordered the repair of the nine-story wooden pagoda of Hwangnyongsa, which came to completion on the 25th day of the eleventh lunar month, 872. As is well known, Hwangnyongsa was the most prestigious Buddhist temple in Silla. Of the three national treasures that were believed to protect Silla, two were housed in this temple; namely, the sixteen-foot Buddha statue (*jangnyuk jonsang*) and the nine-story pagoda. The repair of the nine-story pagoda was a move intended to cast a positive light on the royal family and make it the center of political power in the kingdom.

On the other hand, There were resistances about King Gyeongmun's policies above. In the tenth lunar month, 866 (6th year of King Gyeongmun's reign), Yunheung and his two brothers, Sukheung and Gyeheung, conspired to depose the king. Two years later, in the first lunar month, 868 (8th year of King Gyeongmun's reign), Kim Ye and Kim Hyeon rebelled against the Crown, and in the fifth lunar month, 874 (14th year of King Gyeongmun's reign), Geunjong initiated an uprising. In the first lunar month, 866, King Gyeongmun bestowed the posthumous title 'King Uigong' upon his late father, at the same as investing his son Jeong as Crown Prince. The Rebellion of Yunheung appears to have had something to do with these events. Kim Ye was a cousin of King Munseong. As of 855 (17th year of King Munseong's reign), he was the Magistrate of Giyang-hyeon (present-day Sinchang-myeon, Asan) in Ungju. The construction of Mugujeongtap in Changnimsa Temple in Mt. Nam, in Gyeongju was supervised by him and two other cousins once-removed cousins of the king, Kim Gyejong and Kim Hunyeong. The consensus is that these three rebellions were somehow related to the fact that the royal line now belonged to the Kim Heonjeong branch.

King Gyeongmun responded to these rebellions with an iron fist. He ordered that Yunheung who fled to Daesan-gun (either Seongju or Chilbo-myeon in Jeongeup) be arrested and killed, also putting all his household members and relatives to death. When Geunjong's troops attacked the palace, they were defeated by the royal guard, and when the fleeing Geunjong was finally captured, he was drawn and quartered. All the while promoting reconciliation between opposing branches of royals and *jingol* aristocrats, King Gyeongmun did not hesitate to mercilessly crush those that defied his authority. His effort to consolidate the monarch's power also took the form of overhauling government institutions.

### The Expansion of Royal Aides, Advisors and Scribes

Before he rose to the throne, King Gyeongmun was a *hwarang*. He married the eldest daughter of King Heonan, following the advice of Beomgyosa, who was a monk belonging to Heungnyun Temple and the *hwarang* teacher. As a king, he had the support of various *hwarang* of the likes of Yowonnang, Yeheunnang, Gyewon and Sukjongnang; which leads us to believe that the *hwarang* group played a sizeable role in securing the

throne for him, as well as exerting a considerable influence on his rule.

Around the time of King Gyeongmun, there was also an attempt to consolidate monarchical rule through a Chinese assimilation policy. Some related evidence can be found in epigraphic records dating from the late ninth century. Chinese-style names used for government offices and titles between 759 (18th year of King Gyeongdeok's reign) and early 776 (12th year of King Hyegong's reign) were revived in the late ninth century. Agencies and offices such as Yegungjeon, Yeonggaekbu, Naeseong and Sajeongbu were now referred to as Jingakseong, Sabinbu, Jeonjungseong and Sukjeongdae respectively. As for titles of officials, Byeongbu (Defense Ministry) Daegam (Deputy Minister) was renamed "Sirang", Daesa "Nangjung" and Nosaji "Sabyeong". In the case of Changbu (Finance Ministry) Gyeong (Deputy Minister) was now referred to as "Sirang", Daesa "Nangjung" and Josaji "Wonoerang". Meanwhile, the Governor of Paegangjin, originally called Dusangdaegam was designated as Doho in various epigraphs of the late ninth century.

The most obvious benefit of such a Chinese influenced reform of government institutions was the empowerment of the monarch. This may indeed have been necessary if one considers how seriously the royal government's authority was undermined by the series of battles for Silla's throne. A government office that deserves particular attention in this regard is Jungsaseong, a secretariat of sorts. It was initially known as "Setaek" and was renamed Jungsaseong during King Gyeongdeok's reign. This name, which had not been used for some time, was revived during King Hyegong's reign. The name of the office again reverted to the original one thereafter before it was once again changed to Jungsaseong in 872 (12th year of King Gyeongmun's reign), the name that was maintained until the fall of Silla.

There were two Jungsaseong, one assisting the king, and another assisting the crown prince. In the late ninth century, Jungsaseong was staffed with scholars of Sungmundae, a literary institution within the royal palace. For example, Yo Geugil, famous in King Gyeongmun's time for his literary skills, was concurrently a member of Sungmundae and an officer of Jungsaseong. Therefore, Jungsaseong appears to have been responsible for drafting the king's orders and edicts, at the same time as providing education to the crown prince, such as tutoring him on the Confucian classics.

Another example of a new office having the duty of closely assisting the king is Seongyoseong. Seongyoseong, only mentioned in epigraphs dating from the late ninth century, is believed to have been established no later than 860 (4th year of King Heonan's reign). The role of this office was receiving the king's orders and transmitting them through the chain of command. Interestingly, the name 'Seongyoseong' is quite similar to Seonjoseong, a government office of Balhae. Given the similarity of its name to Seonjoseong, Seongyoseong may have been responsible for putting the kings' orders in writing and carrying them out.

In the mid-ninth century when monarchical authority had gradually recovered, there was a greater need for government bodies exclusively assigned to assist the king and execute his orders. Hence, Setaek, previously a simple secretariat, was renamed Jungsaseong. At the same time, the organization appears to have also been empowered so that it could play a key role in forming the inner circle of power around the king. Through Jungsaseong and Seongyoseong, King Gyeongmun seems to have provided himself with a close political entourage loyal to him.

On the 8th day of the seventh lunar month, 875, King Gyeongmun passed away after fifteen years of rule. He was succeeded by Kim Jeong, his son and Crown Prince. The new king (King Heongang) put Kim Wihong at the helm of his government by appointing him Sangdaedeung. The post of Sijung went to Yegyeom. Kim Wihong was an uncle to the king who was a government insider already during his father's reign. In 865 (5th year of King Gyeongmun's reign), Kim Wihong led the project of constructing Goksa Temple, together with Gyejong and Hunyeong. When King Gyeongmun received investiture from Tang, he reported it to the ancestral spirits at the Jongmyo Shrine in the king's stead. In 871 (11th year of King Gyeongmun's reign), he was placed in charge of the project to repair the nine-story wooden pagoda of Hwangnyongsa Temple in his capacity as Sangjaesang and Byeongburyeong. Given that King Heongang was only fifteen years of age at the time of his coronation, Kim Wihong may have played the role of a regent.

A noteworthy development during King Heongang's reign was the expansion of literary or scholarly organizations within the royal government, which also enjoyed a more elevated status. Late ninth-century epigraphic records indicate that Hallimdae was renamed *Seoseowon* circa 880 (6th year of King Heongang's reign), at the same time as the establishment of Haksa and Jikhaksa to replace Hallimnang. These scholarly bodies were staffed with

people who had studied in Tang China, of the likes of Choe Chiwon and Bak Inbeam. Based on the evidence gathered from these records, Seoseowon appears to have been the main scholarly body at that time. As was the case in King Gyeongmun's time, scholarly bodies were closely linked to the king's secretariat and advisory bodies. Choe Chiwon served concurrently as Sidok (lecturer in palace seminars held for the king or crown prince), Hallim Scholar and Jiseoseo-gamsa (the director of royal library). The situation appears to have been such that scholarly and advisory bodies were becoming fused together. This development can be seen as part of a trend toward the consolidation of the inner power circle around the king.

On the 9th day of the ninth lunar month, 880 (6th year of King Heongang's reign), the king went up to Wolsang Pavilion to take in the view of the surroundings. The capital city down below was densely filled with houses, and songs were heard, one after another. The king then said to Sijung Mingong, "I heard that people's homes have tiled roofs instead of thatched roofs, and they cook their meals on charcoal and not with firewood. Is that really the case?" Mingong answered that that was also his understanding and praised the king for bringing prosperity to his people. In the third lunar month of the following year, the king threw a banquet for his courtiers at Imhaejeon. The king played the *geomungo*, and the courtiers composed lyrics to the tunes he played, to the delight of the entire company. The time indeed seems to have been one of great peace and prosperity. However, in the records of this prosperous reign, one also detects a palpable sense of foreboding.

When King Heongang went to Geumgangnyeong, the God of the North Mountain is said to have appeared to him and danced before him. Moreover, during a banquet at Dongnyejeon, the God of the Earth is said to have appeared and danced. The Mountain God is reported to have sung a song with the refrain "*Jiri-da-dopa dopa*," which means that those who ruled the country with wisdom had the foresight to see what lay ahead and fled the capital city, which was soon to be destroyed. The gist of these accounts is in sum that King Heongang and his courtiers did not act upon the warnings from the God of the Earth and the Mountain God, thus failing to save the kingdom from its impending doom.

# 4

## New Philosophical and Ideological Trends

### Trends of the Confucian Scholars of the *Yukdupum* Class

In the *golpum* system, the *yukdupum* (head-rank six) class was the highest after the *jingol* class. Even though they belonged to the upper strata of Silla's social hierarchy, people of the *yukdupum* class, nevertheless, could not aspire to occupy the highest political offices and were also subject to various other restrictions. Because of this, many members of the *yukdupum* nobility sought, from early on, to shine through their scholarship. Gangsu and Seol Chong who carved out a name for themselves through their literary skills and Confucian scholarship are two fine cases in point. Confucian scholars of the *yukdupum* class hoped to become close advisors to the king by using their erudition.

In the spring of 788 (4th year of King Wonseong's reign), the king implemented a new recruitment system called Dokseosampumgwa. In this system, candidates for government offices were divided into three classes according to their level of knowledge of Confucian scriptures and history books. Above the three classes, there was also a special class. Therefore, this system had four classes in practice.

It was said about this new system, "Previously, government officials were selected based solely on their archery marksmanship. This practice was rectified at this time." With the implementation of Dokseosampumgwa, no one could aspire to become a government official without having first studied Confucianism.

**Degrees and Examination Subjects of Dokseosampumgwa (Examination in the Reading of Texts in Three Gradations)**

Class	Subjects of Examination
Special Class	Ogyeong (Five Confucian Classics), Samsa ( <i>Shiji</i> [Records of the Grand Historian], <i>Han Shu</i> , <i>Hou Han Shu</i> ), Jejabaekgaseo (books of the Hundred Schools of Thought)
1st Class	<i>Liji</i> , <i>Xiao jing</i> , <i>Lunyu</i> , <i>Chun qiu zuo zhuan</i> (Mr. Zuo's Spring and Autumn Annals), <i>Wen xuan</i>
2st Class	<i>Qul</i> [Specific Rites of Propriety], <i>Xiao jing</i> , <i>Lunyu</i>
3st Class	<i>Quli</i> , <i>Xiao jing</i>

In 789 (5th year of King Wonseong's reign), one year after the start of the Dokseosampumgwa, a controversy erupted surrounding the appointment of Jaok as the Sosu of Yanggeun-hyeon. Mocho, a low-ranking officer of the Jipsabu protested this appointment, saying that Jaok did not become an official through Munjeok, and that he, therefore, could not be given a local administrator. The Sijung rebuffed him, saying that Jaok had studied in Tang China and that there should not be any problem hiring him, given his profile. As a matter of fact, his appointment was ratified by the king. Munjeok appears to be a term designating either Gukhak or Dokseosampumgwa. Hence, the rule was that anyone equipped with sufficient knowledge of Confucianism, including those who studied Confucianism in China, could become an official, even if they had not graduated from the Gukhak or passed the Dokseosampumgwa.

Traveling to China to study Confucianism became highly popular starting in the ninth century. As of the third lunar month, 837 (2nd year of King Huigang's reign), as many as 216 Silla scholars studied in Guoxue in Tang China. In 840 (2nd year of King Munseong's reign), 105 students, whose period of study in Tang had exceeded ten years, were made to return to Silla. Considering that this was a time in the aftermath of a war of succession in Silla, this number must have included people who were postponing their return due to the political uncertainty at home. Even if one takes this into account, the number of students who were studying in China at that time appears to have been quite impressive.

In 821 (13th year of King Heondeok's reign), Kim Ungyeong successfully passed Bingongke, Tang service examination for foreign nationals. According to some historians, Bingongke was not a separately administered exam, but non-Chinese persons who were successful at the Jinsi

examination were simply called Bingongjинshi. At any rate, as many as fifty-eight Silla scholars successfully passed the Tang civil service examination. The best known examples of these include Choe Chiwon (874: 14th year of King Gyeongmun's reign), Bak Inbeom (876: 2nd year of King Heongang's reign), Choe Seungu (893: 7th year of Queen Jinseong's reign) and Choe Eonwi (906: 10th year of King Hyogong's reign).

Those who shined at the Dokseosampumgwa examination were usually current students or graduates of Gukhak. Many of the students and graduates of Gukhak were as a matter of fact members of the *yukdupum* class. *Yukdupum* scholars who were admitted through the Dokseosampumgwa were guaranteed a government office. As can be seen from the example of Jaok, those who studied in Tang China received preferential treatment. Some of those who were successful in the Tang civil service examination became officials of the their government. When these people returned to Silla, they were treated as 'Guksa' (royal mentor) and were highly respected. Quite a few of these scholars educated in Tang China or those who successfully passed the Bingongke were again members of the *yukdupum* class. Hence, academic stays in China, coupled with passing the Dokseosampumgwa or Bingongke, opened the door to a government career for people of the *yukdupum* class.

In late Silla, Confucian scholars of the *yukdupum* class frequently served as advisors to the king, as did the preceding generations of scholars. Nokjin, for example, was Jipsa-sirang as of 818 (10th year of King Heondeok's reign), with the rank of *Achan*. Based on his post and rank, Nokjin was probably of the *yukdupum* class. Nokjin advised Kim Chunggong, the Sangdaedeung of King Heondeok's court who was responsible for personnel affairs, saying, "Give high offices to great talents, and light responsibilities to smaller talents." He, therefore, emphasized ability as being the chief criterion in recruitment.

In the second lunar month, 863 (3rd year of King Gyeongmun's reign), the king paid a visit to the Gukhak. On this occasion, professors including doctors were made to hold seminars on Confucian scriptures and were offered gifts from the king. In the second lunar month, 879 (5th year of King Heongang's reign), King Heongang also visited the Gukhak. These two kings valued Gukhak as the hall of Confucian learning and the cradle of political philosophy. It has been conjectured that it was around this time that Gukhak was split into Gukjagam and Taehak. Also around this time, the Silla kings sought to strengthen their position by expanding the number of aides,

namely, advisory or scholarly offices who closely assisted them in ruling decisions. Many Confucian scholars of the *yukdupum* class who returned from Tang were hired by scholarly institutions like Seoseowon.

By becoming members of the close entourage of the king, Confucian scholars of the *yukdupum* class were able to build their political and social influence. Even so, the barrier based on their social class was real, and there was only so much they could do to overcome it. Hence, many wished for there to be a state-administered civil service examination similar to the *keju* (K. *gwageo*) of Tang China. Some even negated outright the rationale for and legitimacy of the *golpum* system.

Queen Jinseong delegated her power to a handful of officials in her close entourage when Kim Wihong, her longtime political supporter, suddenly passed away. Soon there was an outcry about these associates of the queen, accusing them of having caused the laxity of discipline in the political class. Anonymous leaflets containing cogent criticisms of Queen Jinseong's reign and her close associates circulated in the capital city. The government suspected a certain Wang Geoin as the author of these leaflets and arrested and jailed him. It was recorded that Wang Geoin, who felt wrongfully accused, wrote words of indignation on the prison wall, and on the evening of the same day, clouds suddenly gathered in the sky, which became thickly overcast with fog, followed by lightning and hail. The queen, frightened by these ominous signs, had him released. Wang Geoin was a Confucian scholar who was probably a member of the *yukdupum* class. Unable to attain a position in the government that could allow him to pursue his political ideals, he had returned home to Daeyaju where he was staying at the time of his arrest. Prior to this event, during King Heongang's reign, there was a prophecy that said that wise men would flee the country and that the kingdom would soon be brought to its knees. Some of the Confucian scholars of the *yukdupum* class were indeed critical of the way Silla was ruled and even left the capital city.

In 894 (8th year of Queen Jinseong's reign), Choe Chiwon submitted his list of the dozen urgent tasks to Queen Jinseong. Although nothing of the content of this list is known today, it must have contained proposals for steering Silla out of the crises it was faced with. Choe Chiwon studied in China and later became an official of Tang after successfully passing the civil service examination. Given his experience in the Tang government, the dozen tasks he proposed could have included a new recruitment system for civil

officials based on merit, rather than on inherited social class. Furthermore, as Choe Chiwon had also served as the local governor in various places across Silla, he was probably well aware of the reality of life in the countryside. Hence, the dozen tasks must certainly have included solutions to the peasant uprisings and a response to the emergence of *bojok*.

Queen Jinseong is said to have rather welcomed Choe Chiwon's proposals, rewarding him with the rank of *Achan*. However, his proposals do not seem to have been properly implemented. A few years after he submitted his proposals, Choe Chiwon retired from the political scene in the capital city and spent the rest of his life in Haeinsa Temple. Much like Wang Geoin, after realizing his inability to change the world for the better, Choe Chiwon turned his back on it and became a hermit. There were two other Choe's who, along with Choe Chiwon, were famously known as *Namalsam Choe* [Three Choe's of Late Silla]. One of them was Choe Seungu who also was admitted to government service in Tang China through the civil service examination and was an official under a military governor. When he returned from Tang he became a deputy of King Gyeon Hwon, the king of Later Baekje. The other one was Choe Eonwi who upon return from Tang worked as a scribe in Silla's royal court for a time, but later gave his allegiance to Goryeo.

Late Silla also saw the emergence of an intelligentsia based in locations outside the capital area. Choe Eung, a native of Tosan in Hwangju (present-day Tosangun), was well versed in Confucian scriptures and was a talented writer. He had a career as a court scribe, serving as Hallimnang in King Gungye's court and holding the post as the Minister of Wonbongseong in the Goryeo court. Bak Yu, a native of Gwanghaeju (present-day Chuncheon), was broadly read in Confucianism and history. He held the post of Donggung gisil in Gungye's court and later fled the latter's ruthless rule to live in hiding. King Taejo Wang Geon thought highly of him, saying that for him to have Bak Yu was the same as King Wen of Zhou having the great military strategist, Jiang Ziya. Finally, Choe Jimong was a man from Yeongam who was not only knowledgeable in scriptures and history but was also well versed in astronomy and divination. Choe Jimong held offices in the Goryeo government. In early Goryeo, schools existed in Cheongju. Therefore, it is possible that in late Silla, schools were established in major local cities such as the five local capitals and nine cities. Hence, scholars who returned home after abandoning their dream of a political career

probably played a role in their respective communities, for example, by mentoring young scholars. Confucian scholars based in places outside the capital area either served *bojok* lords in their area or participated in building the framework of a new country in the making.

### Zen Buddhism and Feng Shui

The doctrine of Uisang, famously remembered as the founder of the *Hwaeom* (C. *Huayan*) Buddhism of Silla, is known as “Wonyung,” a reconciliatory doctrine in which all things in the universe are believed to converge into one. As this doctrine was perceived to lend support to the centralized government system built around the king, Hwaeom Buddhism was enthusiastically welcomed by the Silla kings of the Middle period. The fervor of Silla’s rulers for Hwaeom Buddhism, in fact, continued undiminished to the Late period.

Haeinsa Temple, which counted among the ten Silla temples where research and education in Hwaeom Buddhism thrived, certainly had a heavy Hwaeom leaning. Haeinsa was constructed in 802 (3rd year of King Aejang’s reign) and was funded and endorsed by the royal family. The ink-written inscription discovered on the surface of the Vairocana statue, housed in Haeinsa’s Beopo Hall (*Bepojeon*), for instance, says that a gilt statue was created in 883 (9th year of King Heongang’s reign), in honor of Daegakgan (a special title bestowed upon Kim Yusin for conquering Baekje, literally meaning ‘Supreme Minister’) and the queen. Haeinsa had sobriquets like ‘Bukgung-haeinsu’ or ‘Hyeseongdaewang-wondang.’ Queen Jinseong, before she became the sovereign of Silla, occupied Bukgung or the northern palace and was referred to as ‘Bukgung-janggongju’ [Eldest Princess of the Northern Palace]. In 888 (2nd year of Queen Jinseong’s reign) when Kim Wihong died, she posthumously named him king (King Hyeseong: Hyeseong daewang). Hence, Haeinsa was a temple patronized by Queen Jinseong when she was still a princess and was later chosen as the temple for offering prayers for the soul of Kim Wihong. The temple was patronized in fact by both King Heongang and Queen Jinseong.

In late Silla, there were two resident monks at Haeinsa who were savants of Hwaeom Buddhism; Gwanhye and Huirang. Gwanhye was a supporter of King Gyeon Hwon of Later Baekje, and Huirang a supporter

of King Taejo Wang Geon of Goryeo. These two monks differed from each other not only in their political views, but also in their philosophical and ideological leanings. According to their disciples, the antagonism between the two, which they likened to the incompatibility of water and fire, eventually reached a breaking point. Gwanhye’s followers were known as Namak (South Peak), and Huirang’s Bugak (North Peak). Hence, their rivalry was referred to as the rivalry of the South and North Peaks. That these two senior monks of Haeinsa, which was so doted on by the royal family, openly declared their support for Gyeon Hwon and Wang Geon, is indicative of how moribund Silla was as a dynasty and a country.

The Late period saw the great rise of Zen Buddhism. Southern Zen Buddhism was introduced in Silla, in 821 (13th year of King Heondeok’s reign), by Doui. Southern Zen Buddhism, however, failed to generate enthusiasm, and Doui retired to Mt. Seorak where he spent the rest of his life secluded from the world. Hongcheok and Hyeso followed in the footsteps of Doui and attempted to popularize Zen Buddhism in their turn. Later, around the time of the so-called Huichang Persecution of Buddhism in China, begun in 845 (7th year of King Munseong’s reign), several Zen Buddhist masters returned from Tang. The royal family invited them to the palace and provided them with support, appointing them ‘Guksa,’ royal mentors. The Zen Buddhist masters favorably responded to the interest shown in them by the royal family, as this could be an opportunity to finally build acceptance for their school of Zen Buddhism in Silla.

In around 830, Hongcheok of the Silsangsan School of Zen Buddhism visited the royal palace on the request of King Heungdeok and Crown Prince Seongang. Many other Zen Buddhist masters met with the king thereafter. Sucheol, a disciple of Hongcheok, once discussed with King Gyeongmun about how Zen Buddhism differed from the various non-Zen sects of Buddhism. He later also met with King Heongang. Both King Gyeongmun and King Heongang were keenly interested in Zen Buddhism and revered Zen Buddhist Masters. Nanghye of the Seongjusan School was one of the Zen Buddhist Masters who formed close ties with the royal family.

King Munseong renamed the temple where Nanghye was the head monk Seongjusa and made it a subsidiary temple of Daeheungnyunsa Temple. As a prince, King Heonan behaved reverentially toward his mentor Nanghye. After becoming king, he sought advice from Nanghye on how to rule the country. Nanghye advised him to keep in mind at all times

the saying of Zhou Feng of the State of Lu that a monarch needs to be polite, loyal, and sincere to gain the trust and affection of his subjects. In 871 (11th year of King Gyeongmun's reign), he was invited to the palace and answered King Gyeongmun's questions about Buddhist precepts. After King Heongang succeeded to King Gyeongmun, Nanghye drew the ruler's attention to the importance of appointing the right people in the government. The king regularly consulted with Nanghye on issues of importance for the state. Nanghye suggested the king to turn to Buddha and abide by his teachings by quoting the advice of He Changzhi to Emperor Wen of the Song Dynasty. Nanghye was the first Zen Buddhist Master appointed as a royal mentor.

Silla Zen Buddhist Masters were the intellectuals of their time. Kings sought their opinions on the guiding principles of government and advice on policies. Zen Buddhist Masters were willing to take on an advisory role for the kings, when called upon to do so, to assist with issues of government. The expectation that this would help with the spread of Zen Buddhism was certainly a factor in their responsiveness to the ruler's call. Silla kings of later eras also showed themselves to be keen on having Zen Buddhist Masters in their close political entourage.

In 906 (10th year of King Hyogong's reign), the king chose Haengjeok of the Gulsan School as his mentor. Later, in 915 (4th year of King Sindeok's reign), Haengjeok came back to the capital city, summoned by King Sindeok. The king arranged to have him stay in Silje Temple in Mt. Nam. This temple was where King Sindeok had lived while still a prince. Like King Hyogong before him, King Sindeok wished to be mentored by Haengjeok and showed him the highest respect. In 918 (2nd year of King Gyeongmyeong's reign), the king invited Simhui of the Bongnimsan School to the capital city. During his stay in the capital city as the king's guest, Simhui offered him advice on how to govern the country and help improve the life of his people. At the passing of Simhui, King Gyeongmyeong had a stele erected in his memory and personally composed the epigraph for the stele.

From the reign of Queen Jinseong, however, Silla's Zen Buddhist Masters tended to increasingly associate themselves with *bojok* lords, rather than with the kings. Simhui, whom King Gyeongmyeong treated as his teacher, was later patronized by Kim Yulhi and Kim Ingwang, two overlords of Gimhae. King Gyeongmyeong continued to treat Simhui cordially, and the latter for a time stayed in the capital city as his guest. However, the monk eventually

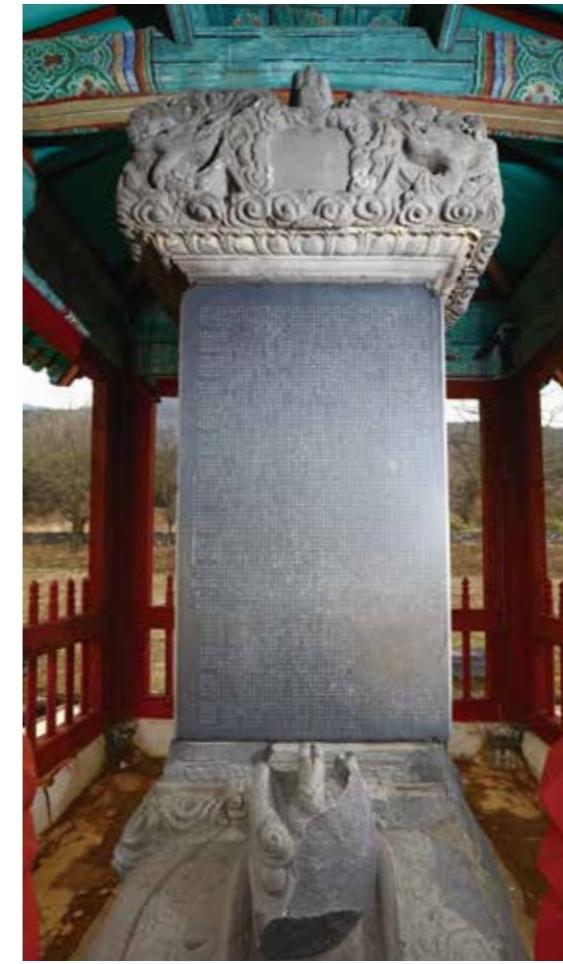


Fig 8. Stele for Buddhist Monk Nanghye at Seongjusa Temple Site, Boryeong

returned to Bongnim Temple. Meanwhile, Gaecheong of the Gulsan School was patronized by Kim Sunsik, a *bojok* lord of Myeongju. When King Gyeongae sent him an emissary to invite him to the capital city, Gaecheong declined the invitation. The individualistic tendency in Zen Buddhism made it somewhat compatible with *bojok*, who took an independent stance vis à vis the central government. Moreover, most Zen Buddhist Masters were based in remote provinces far from the royal capital, and it was therefore more natural and simpler for them to find a patron among the local lords of their respective areas.

As King Gyeon Hwon of Later Baekje and King Taejo Wang Geon of Goryeo rose to prominence, an increasing number of Buddhist monks

formed close ties with them. One example is Pyeonun of the Silsangsan School who was a disciple of Hongcheok and the founder of Anbong Temple in Seongju. His stupa has survived until today on the ancient grounds of Silsangsa Temple's Jogye Hermitage in Namwon. According to the epigraph, the stupa was erected on "Gyeongo, the tenth year of Jeonggae." 'Jeonggae' is the era name used in Later Baekje, and 'Gyeongo,' the tenth year of this era is 910. Aside from this information, nothing else is known on this subject, however, pointing to the existence of a relationship between the Silsangsan School and King Gyeon Hwon. King Gyeon Hwon moreover was the benefactor of Gyeongbo, a disciple of Doseon of the Dongnisan School, who returned from China in 921 (5th year of King Gyeongmyeong's reign). He was initially granted residence in Nambok *seonwon*, a Zen Buddhist retreat in Jeonju, thanks to King Gyeon Hwon. Later, he relocated to Ongnyong Temple where Doseon had once been the head monk, again through King Gyeon Hwon's intervention. The interest and care King Gyeon Hwon demonstrated toward Gyeongbo could have had to do with the feng shui theory of Doseon, the latter's mentor, which he perhaps considered useful for justifying the existence of Later Baekje.

Wang Geon actively wooed monks of various schools of Zen Buddhism. Ieom, Yeoeom, Gyeongyu and Hyeongmi, together known as Samuoesa, are the most famous examples of Zen Buddhist Masters who were King Taejo Wang Geon's close aides. King Taejo Wang Geon sought to be enlightened by Gyeongyu in how to rule over his people and treated him as his teacher. In 923 (7th year of King Gyeongmyeong's reign), King Taejo Wang Geon had Ieom stay in Gaegyeong and listened to his sermons. Ieom taught him to care for his people, never to take the lives of the innocent, and to punish those who committed crimes. In 932 (6th year of King Gyeongsun's reign), Ieom took up residence in Gwangjo Temple in Haeju on the order of King Taejo Wang Geon, where he founded the Sumisan School of Zen Buddhism. Meanwhile, Yeoeom advised the king to emulate the benevolence (in) and virtue (deok) of Emperor Yao and Shun as a way to make the country prosperous and ease the life of its people. The political advice offered by these four Zen Buddhist masters was imbued with Confucian ideals. Zen Buddhism embraced other schools of Buddhist thought, especially Hwaeom Buddhism. In that, it echoed King Taejo Wang Geon's tolerant and conciliatory view of unification.

In 924 (1st year of King Gyeongae's reign) when the Zen Buddhist

master Hyeonhwu returned from China, King Taejo Wang Geon appointed him as his mentor and had him stay in Jeongto Temple in Chungju. Heonhwu was also a Zen Buddhist master who was open and tolerant to other schools and doctrines of Buddhism and attempted to forge a system of thought that incorporated concepts of Hwaeom Buddhism and the Dharma-characteristics school (Beopsangjung, 法相宗). A number of other Zen Buddhist Masters, aside from those discussed here, also served as spiritual advisors to King Taejo Wang Geon at varying points in time.

The Late period was also a period when feng shui became widely popular in Silla. Feng shui was already well known in Silla during King Wonseong's time (r. 785–799) through various scriptures imported from China. However, it did not quite become part of Silla's culture until Doseon of the Dongnisan School of Zen Buddhism popularized it. By fusing together the Yin-Yang and Five Element theory with the Buddhist concept of merit, Doseon formulated his own system of thought. He, otherwise, is said to have traveled throughout the country to interpret and assess the feng shui dispositions of various places.

Toward 906 (10th year of King Hyogong's reign), King Gungye occupied Sangju and the surrounding region. This provided him with a strategic beachhead in close proximity to Silla's capital city. It is at this point that King Gungye, confident of his military might, started to exhibit an ambition to conquer and annex Silla. He had his people refer to Geumseong, Silla's capital, as Myeoldo [Doomed City]. Drawing on feng shui theory, King Gungye predicted that Silla's ruler and its ruling elite were to meet an imminent fall. He, thereby, successfully undermined faith in Geumseong as the center from which Silla's vitality as a kingdom emanated.

Meanwhile, King Taejo Wang Geon claimed that Songak was an auspicious city (*myeongdang*) which would produce the future unifier of the Later Three Kingdoms, quoting Doseon. On the other hand, he warned future rulers, in his *Siphunyo* (Ten Injunctions), against the area south of Charyeong Pass, saying that the lay of the land there suggested disloyalty and treachery and recommending not hiring anyone from this area for government offices. Greater and lesser *bojok* lords also resorted to feng shui to choose their geographical base and justify the existence of the polity or state they created. They invariably vilified the location of their rivals as places of disloyalty and treachery. Their purpose in doing this was to guard against the people of Later Baekje.

## End Time Consciousness and the Maitreya Cult

Jinpyo, a Buddhist monk from the tail end of the Middle period, famously remembered as the founder of the Maitreya cult in Silla, believed and professed that the Age of Dharma Decline and the end of the world was nigh. Hence, in his practice of Buddhism, the adoration of Ksitigarbha, the savior of sentient beings in the Age of Dharma Decline and end time, and *jeomchal beophoe*, a mass of repentance ahead of the Age of Dharma Decline and end time, occupied an important place. His belief that the Age of Dharma Decline and end time was approaching, along with the Maitreya cult, spread across the country through his disciples.

Zen Buddhists of late Silla also believed that they lived at a time when Dharma declined and the world was coming to an end. We read on the tablet of the stupa erected for Yeomgeo of the Gajisan School who died in 844 (6th year of King Munseong's reign), "Since Śākyamuni Buddha entered Nirvana 1,804 years have elapsed." The belief was that after the death of Śākyamuni, the Age of True Dharma would last 500 years followed by 1,000 years of the Age of Semblance Dharma, which would then be followed by the Age of Dharma Decline (malbeop), which was also called the end of the world (malse). Counting the number of years that had elapsed since the passing of Śākyamuni reflected the end time consciousness of Buddhists in this period. Another such example is seen in the inscription on the iron Vairocana statue housed in Borimsa, a major temple of the Gajisan School. A third example is the inscription on the iron Vairocana of Dopiansa in Cheorwon, although this temple is not a Zen Buddhist one. The inscription relates that the statue was cast in 865 (5th year of King Gyeongmun's reign), with an added remark that this was 1,806 years since the passing of Śākyamuni.

In the Late period, the tension between Zen Buddhism and non-Zen Buddhism escalated. This was a time of great unrest in Silla. *Jingol* aristocrats battled each other for the right of succession, and after each poor harvest, peasants left their hometowns in droves, becoming vagabonds, and brigands rampaging throughout the countryside. Silla people, therefore, perceived their time as the Age of Dharma Decline and the end time, which they believed would be plagued with famine, disease and war. Those who made Vairocana statues probably hoped to be saved through their Buddhist faith, and devotees of Maitreya prayed for the coming of Maitreya so that they might be saved.



Fig 9. Inscribed Plaque of Buddhist Monk Yeomgeo from Heungbeopsa Temple Site in Wonju

According to Buddhist scriptures, Maitreya will appear in the very distant future. Maitreya is to become enlightened under a Bodhi tree and save sentient beings. Maitreya being the only remaining Buddha still to come, some believed that the coming of this deity was the only way sentient beings could be saved from suffering. The Maitreya cult, begun by Jinpyo, was especially popular among peasants and appears to have appealed to those who earnestly yearned for social change. The fact that King Gungye called himself Maitreya also shows the considerable popularity of the belief in the descent of Maitreya at that time.

It was believed Maitreya would create the Pure Land on Earth; in other words, he would bring radical changes in the world. The Maitreya cult may, therefore, have served as the religious background to the peasant revolts in late Silla.

## Chapter 3

# The Fall of Silla

Irregular Successions to the Throne  
Peasant Uprisings and Emergence of *Hojok*  
Establishment of the Later Three Kingdoms and the Fall of Silla  
From Silla to Goryeo

## 1

### Irregular Successions to the Throne

#### A Queen Succeeds to the Throne

On the 5th day of the seventh lunar month, 886, King Heongang's reign of twelve years came to a conclusion with his death. He had no male offspring from his queen, Lady Uimyeong, who had only given him several daughters. However, he had one son, born out of wedlock by a woman he had met during a hunting trip. But, his existence was not known until sometime after the king's death. The vacant throne was occupied by Kim Hwang, the younger brother of the king (King Jeonggang). But, King Jeonggang passed away less than a year into his reign, on the 5th day of the seventh lunar month, 887. He was buried on the southeast side of Bori Temple where King Heongang rested. Before his death, King Jeonggang designated his sister Man as his successor, speaking the following words to Junheung, the Sijung at that time: "Unfortunately, I have no son to succeed me. But, my sister Man is intelligent and has the bone structure like a man. Since we have past precedents of having a queen rule our country in Queen Seondeok and Queen Jindeok, I believe that it wouldn't be unwise to have woman accede to the throne." Kim Man thus ascended to the throne, becoming Queen Jinseong.

Three siblings becoming the ruler of Silla one after another as in the case of King Heongang, King Jeonggang and Queen Jinseong, was

unprecedented. Since King Taejong Muyeol had succeeded to Queen Jindeok, all rulers that followed thereafter were kings. Having a new queen at this juncture of Silla's history was, therefore, rather unexpected, if not shocking. King Heonan, for instance, designated his son-in-law as his successor through his final will, in 861 (5th year of Heonan's reign), saying that it was inappropriate to repeat the precedents of Queens Seondeok and Jindeok. The rise of Queen Jinseong to the throne was in fact more a reflection of the desire on the part of King Gyeongmun's descendants not to loosen their grip on power. Also, a certain Kim Wihong played a particularly important role in the transfer of power from King Jeonggang to Queen Jinseong. Kim Wihong was the younger brother of King Gyeongmun, who was also his political advisor. To his nephews and niece, namely, King Heongang, King Jeonggang and Queen Jinseong, he was a political supporter. Kim Wihong was especially close to Queen Jinseong, so much so that there were even rumors about them being a secretly-wedded couple.

Kim Wihong died eight months after the coronation of Queen Jinseong, in the second lunar month, 888. The queen made him posthumously king (King Hyeseong) and had prayers held for him in Haeinsa Temple. The queen also had a three-year mourning period observed for her late uncle. After thus losing her main political supporter, Queen Jinseong appointed several handsome young men to key government positions, who, in fact, ruled the country in her stead. These young men were probably *hwarang* or former *hwarang* who had assisted Kim Wihong in making Kim Man the ruler of Silla and running the country during the early part of her reign. These protégés of the queen faltered in their governing decisions and eventually came under fire, accused of undermining the order and discipline in the political class. Anonymous posters containing criticisms that questioned the legitimacy of Queen Jinseong's rise to the throne and the irregular channels through which the country was governed soon cropped up across the government district of the capital city. According to some sources, leaflets with texts written in Sanskrit-based coded languages were left on the sidewalks of the streets, saying how Queen Jinseong, Kim Wihong, and other key government ministers were driving the country to the brink of disaster.

Meanwhile, in the countryside of Silla, the crisis came to a head. In 889 (3rd year of Queen Jinseong's reign), peasants across the country rose up in protest against the excessive tax. This was only the beginning of a long series of uprisings that followed thereafter. As peasants, the main source

of the country's tax revenues, were continuously revolting against the government, the economic foundation of Silla started to crumble. The *bojok*, to guard themselves against the peasant rebel army, further fortified their fortresses and increased the contingent of private soldiers. One of the effects of the peasants' uprisings was to make the *bojok* yet more independent from the central government.

It was probably to bring this situation back under control that Queen Jinseong called upon Kim Hyojong to join the government. Kim Hyojong was a descendant of King Munseong, the forty-sixth ruler of Silla. His grandfather, Kim Mingong, had served King Heongang as the Sijung. His father, Kim Ingyeong, was the Third State Minister in Queen Jinseong's court. As a *hwarang* leader, Kim Hyojong is said to have had thousands of followers. He is also said to have been a benefactor of Jieun, a poor young maiden residing in Hangibu, who sold herself as a slave to a noble household in order to support her widowed mother. Upon learning about this unfortunate situation, Kim Hyojong sent food and other necessities to the mother, and his *hwarang* followers together helped Jieun. The fact that his followers were so inspired to act together in a coordinated fashion is a clear indication of Kim Hyojong's leadership skills.

Duly impressed by Kim Hyojong's action to assist Jieun, Queen Jinseong arranged a marriage between him and the daughter of late King Heongang, saying, "His judgment is beyond his young years." This utterance is interestingly almost identical to what King Heonan stated in his final will designating Kim Eungnyeom as his successor. As was quoted earlier, he also praised his young successor for the latter's wisdom belying his age. As the husband of King Heongang's daughter, Kim Hyojong now emerged as one of the contenders to the crown. By thus propelling Kim Hyojong to prominence, Queen Jinseong hoped to take advantage of his political skills and his large following to steer the country out of the crisis it was facing.

Yegyeom was also brought onboard. Yegyeom was appointed Sijung in the inaugural year of King Heongang's reign and was succeeded by Kim Mingong in the second lunar month, 881 (6th year of King Heongang's reign). Along with Sangdaedeung Kim Wihong, Yegyeom was one of the two dominant political figures of the early period of King Heongang's reign. During Queen Jinseong's reign, Bak Gyeonghwi, the adopted son of Yegyeom, was married to another daughter of King Heongang. Hence, Bak Gyeonghwi was also a contender to the throne, just like Kim Hyojong. The

political influence of Yegyeom, therefore, must have been considerable.

Some historians believe that Kim Hyojong dominated the political scene in the early part of Queen Jinseong's reign and was replaced by Yegyeom, in this role, in the late part of this reign. According to some scholars, Queen Jinseong purposefully pitted Kim Hyojong and Yegyeom against each other to use their rivalry to her own advantage. In any case, both Kim Hyojong and Yegyeom were persons who had close connections to King Heongang. In other words, Queen Jinseong hoped to weather the crisis by bringing back experienced political hands from the previous reign. However, this alone, without a fundamental solution addressing the causes behind peasants' uprisings and the emergence of powerful *bojok*, was bound to fail to save her reign.

Notwithstanding, in the second lunar month, 894 (8th year of Queen Jinseong's reign), Choe Chiwon submitted a list of the dozen urgent tasks for Silla to the queen. The queen responded well to this submission, bestowing the rank of Achan upon him. Although the details of this list are today completely unknown, it was without a doubt a reform proposal of sorts for the beleaguered regime of Queen Jinseong. However, Choe Chiwon left the political scene a few years after this proposal. Even if Queen Jinseong was favorably disposed to reform, as proposed by Choe Chiwon, the situation was probably such that it was practically impossible to properly implement any such reform. Or even if a reform had been carried out, it is doubtful that it would have produced much benefit, as the situation was already too out of control. King Hyogong's succession to Queen Jinseong, for instance, further discredited the monarchy, and peasants' uprisings continued unabated, with independent local powers continuously mushrooming. Silla was already on a collision course with its ultimate destiny.

### A Non-jingol King

Queen Jinseong concluded her ten years' reign in the sixth lunar month, 897 by stepping down in favor of her nephew, Kim Yo who was begotten out of wedlock by King Heongang. The transfer of power took the form of a voluntary resignation by the queen in acknowledgment of her mistakes as a ruler and her responsibility for losing the allegiance of Silla's provinces.

Kim Yo was brought up outside the royal palace, as a commoner. His

existence became known to the queen in 895 (9th year of Queen Jinseong's reign). The queen ordered Kim Yo to be brought into the palace and patted him on the back, saying, "My siblings have a bone structure that is like none others. This child has two salient ribs, as only a son of King Heongang would have." Thus recognized as the true son of King Heongang, Kim Yo was appointed Crown Prince in the tenth lunar month of the same year. In the sixth lunar month, 897 (11th year of Queen Jinseong's reign), the queen stepped down, transferring the power to him (King Hyogong).

Kim Yo, although the son of King Heongang, does not appear to have belonged to the *jingol* rank. Queen Jinseong used words like "bone structure" precisely to compensate for the fact that he was not a *jingol* (true bone) member of the royal family. Queen Jinseong also chose the transfer of power while she was still living to ensure that Kim Yo would not be edged out by another claimant deemed a more legitimate contender to the crown, such as Kim Hyojong or Bak Gyeonghwui. Once again, extreme measures were taken to ensure that the throne remained within the King Gyeongmun branch of the royal line.

In the first lunar month, 898 (2nd year of King Hyogong's reign), the new king appointed Junheung to the post of Sangdaedeung and Gyegang to the post of Sijung. Junheung held the office of Sangdaedeung until the first lunar month, 906 (10th year of King Hyogong's reign). He had served as the Sijung in King Jeonggang's court and aided in Queen Jinseong's rise to the throne according to the late king's will. Junheung had also held the post of Sangdaedeung during Queen Jinseong's reign. All in all, he held the two top offices of Silla's court, Sijung and Sangdaedeung, for twenty consecutive years, from 886 to 906. He was a strong supporter of the kings of the Gyeongmun line. In 899 (3rd year of King Hyogong's reign), the king married the daughter of Yegyeom who also held the office of Sijung in King Heongang's time. Yegyeom's political influence was, therefore, undiminished into Queen Jinseong's reign. Yegyeom must have been politically more powerful after his daughter had married King Hyogong.

In 902 (6th year of King Hyogong's reign), King Hyogong appointed Kim Hyojong Sijung. Kim Hyojong, being the son-in-law of King Heongang was a brother-in-law of King Hyogong. In the eighth lunar month, 901 (5th year of King Hyogong's reign), Daeyaseong (present-day Hapcheon) came under attack from Later Baekje (Hubaekje). Daeyaseong was an important defense point for stopping the Later Baekje army's progress toward the capital city.

Daeyaseong was then defended by Kim Eongnyeom, the older brother of Kim Hyojong and the uncle of King Gyeongsun. The Later Baekje forces were defeated by Silla troops led by Kim Eongnyeom, which probably helped Kim Hyojong's rise to the post of Sijung. Like Queen Jinseong, King Hyogong tried to ensure the stability of the regime by bringing on board people who were loyal to King Gyeongmun's lineage.

Meanwhile, it has been argued that Silla's local administration system underwent a change during King Hyogong's time to one which was centered on the Jijujegunsa and Seongju. Such a reform is believed to have been one of the "Dozen Urgent Tasks" proposed by Choe Chiwon in 894 (8th year of Queen Jinseong's reign) and to have been implemented during King Hyogong's reign. Jijujegunsa was the title given to local potentates who took over control of *ju* from Dodok. The Jijujegunsa were recognized as having a level of independence and some authority over their local community. In exchange for this, they had to pledge loyalty to Silla's crown which would extend protection to them as well. Due to the social landscape of late Silla, marked by frequent peasant uprisings and the emergence of local overlords (*bojok*), many of the local officials' titles such as Taesu and Hyeollyeong were changed to Seongju (Castellan), a much more militaristic name.

However, some of those who called themselves Jijujegunsa were self-proclaimed Jijujegunsa. Gyeon Hwon, who founded Later Baekje, proclaimed himself Jeonmugongdeungju gunsa after he occupied Mujinju. In some cases, the central government appears to have condoned the unauthorized use of the title Jijujegunsa to later officialize it. Also, around the time of the peasant uprising of 889 (3rd year of Queen Jinseong's reign), new warlords calling themselves Seongju or Janggun (General) seem to have appeared. These various surrounding facts make it rather questionable that the central government indeed implemented the Jijujegunsa-Seongju system. Also, even if it was implemented, it is doubtful that the system was effective in securing the loyalty of the local warlords. In 900 (4th year of King Hyogong's reign), Gyeon Hwon founded Later Baekje, and this was followed by the creation of Later Goguryeo by Gungye in 901. The Korean peninsula was now entering the so-called Later Three Kingdoms Period.

In the eighth lunar month, 905 (9th year of King Hyogong's reign), King Gungye's troops plundered villages in Silla's borderland region, then marched south all the way to the area northeast of Jug Pass (Jungnyeong). King Hyogong, having no means to stop their progress, told the castellans

to stay put and take only defensive measures. Sometime around 906 (10th year of King Hyogong's reign), King Gungye's forces clashed with King Gyeon Hwon's troops in Sangju, bringing this area under their control. In 907 (11th year of King Hyogong's reign), King Gyeon Hwon conquered ten towns south of Iseon-gun (present-day Seonsan). Lacking the capability for a military response, Silla could only watch the enemy gaining ground.

Toward the later part of King Hyogong's reign, most of the statesmen who were his supporters either passed away or retired. King Hyogong, now alone with no trusted political advisor or supporter, was unable to properly respond to attacks from Later Baekje and Majin (Later Goguryeo). Silla's territory, by then, had shrunk to the Gyeongsang-do region. Faced with a situation that he felt exceeded his abilities, King Hyogong seems to have preferred to simply ignore it. King Hyogong, who was head-over-heels in love with one of his concubines, was oblivious to this situation and neglected his duties as the ruler. In 911 (15th year of King Hyogong's reign), Minister Eunyeong urged the king to distance himself from his concubine and, when his pleas proved to be of no avail, took the matter into his own hands and killed the concubine.

## Royal House of Bak

When King Hyogong passed away without a son, Silla's aristocrats raised Bak Gyeonghwi to the throne, thus inaugurating the reign of King Sindeok. Bak Gyeonghwi was a distant descendant of Adala *Isageum* (r. 154–184), the last of a line of kings from the Bak clan. All previous kings since Naemul *Maripgan*, the seventeenth ruler of Silla, had been from the Kim clan. A member of the Bak clan thus became the sovereign of Silla more than seven hundred years after the last reign of a Bak.

There is practically few records about *jingol* aristocrats of the Bak clan after the Middle period. Given such a circumstance, this sudden appearance of a king of the Bak clan has made some historians skeptical as to the veracity of this event. One theory has it that King Sindeok changed his surname from Kim to Bak as a symbolic act declaring the discontinuation of Silla's custom of royal intermarriages as in Tang people with the same surname were not allowed to get married to each other. According to yet another theory, as *Samguk sagi* was written during the Goryeo period, this account was the

result of doctoring by Goryeo historians who thus wanted to cast doubt about the legitimacy of Sindeok's reign and thereby justify the creation of a new dynasty. As a matter of fact, during the Joseon period, it was claimed that King U and King Chang of Goryeo were not descendants of the Wang clan, but of the Buddhist monk Sin Don, as a way of discrediting Goryeo's last two kings and suggesting the need for a new dynasty. However, there is no real cause for questioning the existence of a king from the Bak clan, when written records are unambiguous about this fact.

There were two legitimate candidates to the crown after the death of King Hyogong, Kim Hyojong and Bak Gyeonghwi. Both of them were married to daughters of King Heongang. Kim Hyojong was a prominent *hwarang* during Queen Jinseong's reign and appears also to have been a member of the inner political circle during this period. Later, during King Hyogong's reign, he held the post of Sijung. On the other hand, not much is known about the career of Bak Gyeonghwi. His grandfather Mungwan is said to have had the rank of Haegan; his father Munwon the rank of Igan and his maternal grandfather Sunhong the rank of *Gakgan*. But, aside from this information, nothing else is known about them. On the other hand, his stepfather was Yegyeom, who probably wielded considerable political influence as the father-in-law of King Hyogong. In other words, Yegyeom played a crucial role in enabling Bak Gyeonghwi to become King Sindeok.

The question then is why, of these two, Bak Gyeonghwi was chosen as the new ruler. King Jeonggang, Queen Jinseong and King Hyogong, the three successive rulers who descended from King Gyeongmun, alienated many members of Silla's ruling elite, who objected to how they tried to keep power within their branch of the royal line at all costs. Furthermore, Queen Jinseong and King Hyogong utterly failed in their duty as rulers at a time when Silla was confronted with challenges such as the peasant uprisings, emergence of *bojok* and the advent of the Later Three Kingdoms Period, which threatened its very survival. The coronation of a king of the Bak clan appears to have taken place against this backdrop of the discontent of Silla's ruling class with the kings of the Kim clan and their loss of trust in the latter. It was precisely because of this rejection of the Kim clan that a little known figure like Bak Gyeonghwi could edge out Kim Hyojong in the race to the throne.

In the fifth lunar month, 912, when King Sindeok ascended to the throne, without delay he bestowed the posthumous title of king on his late

father. The title of king was conferred also on his late stepfather Yegyeom and his maternal grandfather. This was part of an effort to garner support for his regime and bolster his authority as a ruler. He appointed his son, Seungyeong, Crown Prince also at this time, letting it be known that future successors to the throne would also be from the Bak clan. However, King Sindeok was probably far from being in a position of strength and had to negotiate with *jingol* aristocrats of the Kim clan at each step of the way in his ruling decisions.

After the passing of King Sindeok, Bak Seungyeong, the crown prince, succeeded to the throne, and the reign of King Gyeongmyeong was ushered in (917–924). King Gyeongmyeong appointed his brother, Bak Wieung, Sangdaedeung. His close relatives were placed in key positions of the new government in an attempt to preempt challenges to the regime. The post of Sijung went to Kim Yuryeom, a nephew of Kim Hyojong who had probably retired from the front line of Silla politics by then. His son, Kim Bu (later King Gyeongsun), is likely to have succeeded him as the leader of his clan. By thus making Kim Yuryeom an insider of the new government, King Gyeongmyeong probably hoped to win over some people from the Kim Bu camp.

## 2

## Peasant Uprisings and Emergence of *Hojok*

### The background and developments of the peasant uprisings

#### Background

After the unification of the Three Kingdoms, the *jingol* aristocrats of Silla and other members of its ruling elite enjoyed an unprecedented period of prosperity thanks to the increased territorial expanse and population. Toward the late ninth century, Geumseong (present-day Gyeongju), which was home to these privileged strata of Silla society, reached its heyday. In King Heongang's time, Geumseong was a metropolis inhabited by hundreds of thousands of people. Opulent mansions decorated with gold, silver or plated with gold could be seen in various places across the city.

However, in contrast to the prosperity in the capital city, the lives of the peasants in Silla's countryside changed for the worse. During years of poor harvest, the countryside swarmed with thieves, brigands, and people abandoning their hometowns and wandering across the country. In the eighth lunar month, 815 (7th year of King Heondeok's reign), following a bad harvest, brigands rampaged through a town in a western borderland region, and government troops had to be dispatched to restore order. In the third lunar month, 819 (11th year of King Heondeok's reign), a spate of crop thefts was reported across the country, and the central government ordered local officials to crack down on such lawless activities. A drought in the

spring and summer of 820 (12th year of King Heondeok's reign) led to crop failure, and come winter, there was an outbreak of famine. As the famine continued into the spring of the following year, some people are said to have even sold their children for grain. Following the outbreak of famine in 816 (8th year of King Heondeok's reign), as many as 170 people crossed the border into the Zhedong region of China, foraging for food. Meanwhile, 826 Silla castaways landed on the various islands of the Japanese archipelago on thirteen occasions between the eighth lunar month, 811 (3rd year of King Heondeok's reign) and the fifth lunar month, 824 (16th year of King Heondeok's reign), most of them might be the wandering peasants.

The account of a dream by Josin, the foreman of a farm belonging to Sedal Temple in Yeongwol, reveals the abject life in the countryside in late Silla. Josin was married to the daughter of Kim Heun, a woman he loved, and had five children from this marriage of forty years. A shack with nothing but four bare walls was what they called home. They lived on gruel made of wild greens, but there was often not enough of even this humble food to go around. For ten years, they wandered around with their children to find food and shelter in tattered clothes that their ribs poked through. When the oldest child starved to death, and the couple was just about to part their ways, each taking two children with them, Josin woke up from his dream. Such was life among the peasants in stark contrast to the affluence of the capital city.

In 828 (3rd year of King Heungdeok's reign), a cunning individual from Pyocheon-hyeon of Hansanju (possibly today's Paju) went around telling people that he knew a secret method to quickly amass wealth; many were beguiled by him. The king sent him into exile on a faraway island, saying, "Punishing those who deceive the masses through wicked ploys was the way among past kings." Incidents of this sort cropped up against the backdrop of widespread penury in the countryside. As they were repeatedly hit by bad harvests and famine, the peasantry felt that the end of the world was looming. Some prayed for the advent of Maitreya so that they might be saved. Maitreya is the Buddha of the future in Buddhist eschatology, who will appear on earth and create an ideal world. Therefore, the popularity of the Maitreya cult around this time possibly echoed the desire for social reforms and revolutions or was at least a reflection of the discontent of the peasantry.

In 889 (3rd year of Queen Jinseong), Silla peasants rose up against the government across the country. The situation at that time is described in

written records as follows: "As many towns have failed to send tax grain, the granaries in the capital are all but empty, and the government is suffering from a lack of resources. When the king dispatched envoys to the provinces to demand the payment of taxes, brigands rose up from all parts of the country, like a swarm of bees." It was therefore the excessive tax burden that incited peasants to revolt. Those peasants who were comparatively better off than the rest and could get by even in spite of the tax burden were land-owning farmers. Thus, the fact that even land-owning farmers, who formed the economic base for the country, joined the revolt in 889 is indicative of how calamitous the situation was in Silla's countryside at that time.

Jingol aristocrats kept acquiring new farms. Buddhist temples also continuously increased their farmland assets, either through donations or purchases or by annexing and merging with neighboring plots. A considerable portion of these farms and farmland were exempted from taxation, both through legal and illegal means. The taxes the nobility and temples evaded were levied from farmers, thus shifting the burden onto the peasantry. When peasants abandoned their land and left their villages, this was also likely to have increased the tax burden for those who remained. Hence, there is hardly any doubt that the direct cause of the peasants' uprisings in 889 was taxes. This problem is certainly also related to *nogeupje*, Silla's compensation system for government officials and the nobility, as well as the structural flaws of the *yeonsu yujeon dapje* system, in which villages collectively cultivated farmland received from the government.

Following the revival of *nogeupje* in 757 (16th year of King Gyeondeok's reign), villages belonging to *nogeup* across Silla were either controlled by aristocrat officials as private domains or by local officials as state-owned domains through the intermediary of *nogeup*. As the control of local provinces by the central government gradually weakened, the private control of villages increased commensurately. This resulted in arbitrary and excessive levying of taxes. Economic hardship drove farmers away from the *nogeup* land, and this, in turn, had the effect of further increasing the burden on those that continued to cultivate these farmland plots. As for the land taxes paid by general farmers, their amounts were based on the cadastral documents of each village and were fixed amounts, unaffected by whether or not a given plot was actually farmed. Further, villages were collectively responsible for paying the land taxes. As the gap between wealthy and poor farmers

widened, and an increasing number of peasants started leaving their villages, the remaining households had to shoulder the entire tax burden. This started a vicious cycle in which peasants kept abandoning their villages, further increasing the tax burden on those who stayed.

### Progress

In 889, the third year of Queen Jinseong's reign, Wonjong and Aeno began their revolt in Sabeolju (present-day Sangju). The queen ordered Yeonggi to lead the army and quash the rebels. Yeonggi, however, when he had the enemy's fort in sight, was too scared to advance. The attack on the rebels was instead led by Uryeon, the village chief (chonju). Queen Jinseong ordered that Yeonggi be beheaded and appointed the ten year-old son of Uryeon, who had fallen in combat, as the new village chief. After much tribulation, the uprising by Wonjong and Aeno was eventually subdued. What this example shows is that government forces failed miserably and that order was ultimately restored by a local chief and his private army. A similar pattern was repeated in other peasant uprisings that followed. Government forces showed themselves to be utterly unable to counter the rebels' advances on their own, thereby proving the incompetence of the central government and dealing a severe blow to the prestige of the royal court.

A monk of Haeinsa Temple wrote the following about the situation at that time, "During the seven-year period from the year of Giyu to the year of Eulmyo, chaos reigned, and battles raged in the countryside. People lost their bearings and behaved like ferocious beasts. As though the end is nigh for this country, even the temples are no longer safe from calamities" (Gilsangtap Pagoda, Odaesansa Temple, Hapcheon). The year of Giyu was 889 (3rd year of Queen Jinseong's reign), and the year of Eulmyo 895 (9th year of Queen Jinseong's reign). The uprisings of peasants, begun in 889, continued through to 895. Haeinsa Temple sustained damage from peasant rebels, with several monks losing their lives in the process. In Haeinsa, there was a monk army, and some of the monastic troops died during their battle against the peasant rebels. As is recorded in the memorial-stele biography at Haeinsa Temple in Hapcheon, Choe Chiwon famously said on this subject, "Everywhere, one encountered what was worse than the worst, and the fields are strewn with the corpses of people who starved or were killed in combat, like stars in the sky."



Fig 1. Gilsangtap Pagoda, Haeinsa Temple, Hapcheon

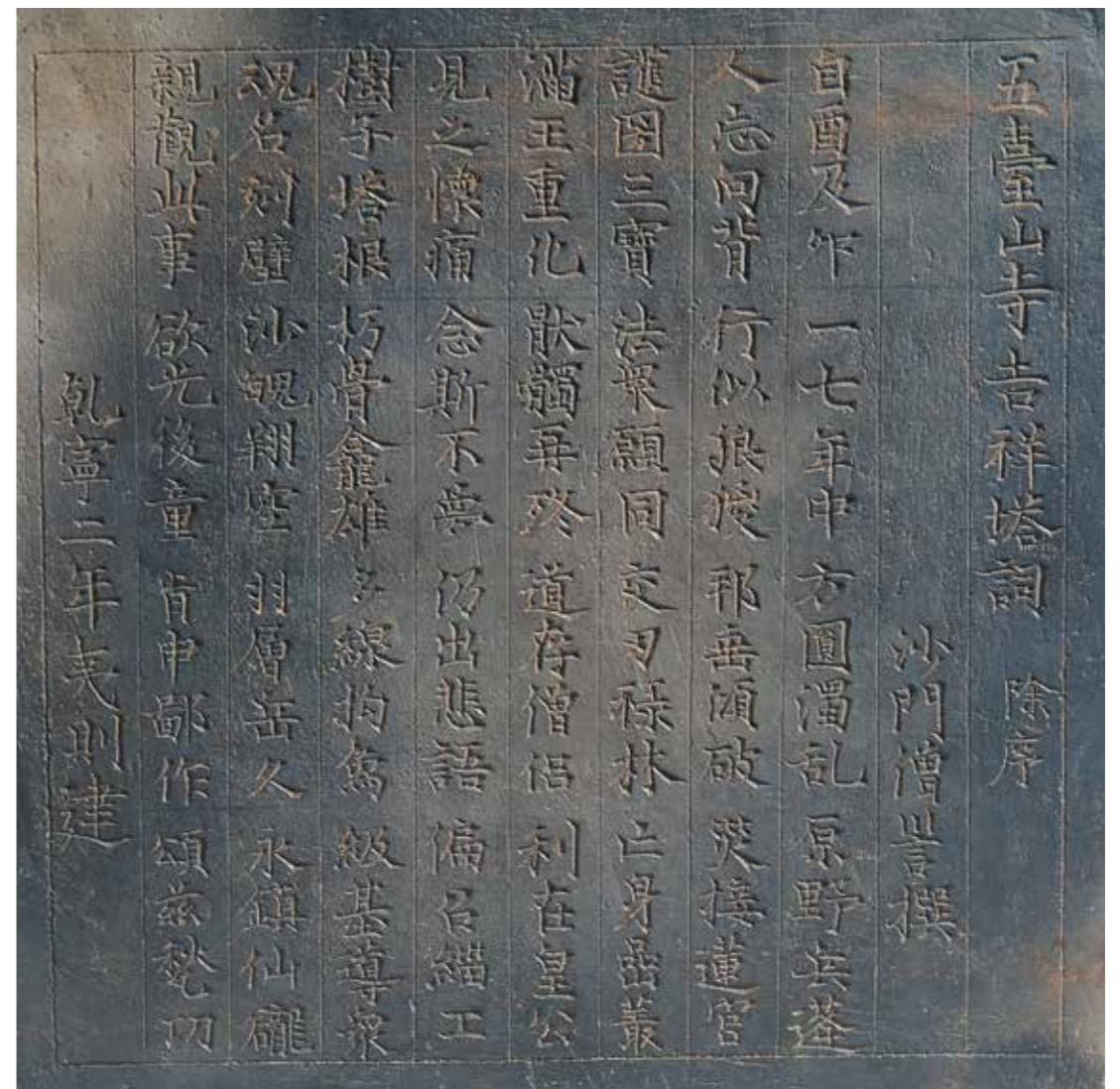


Fig 2. Gilsangtap Pagoda Record, Odaesansa Temple, Hapcheon

In 896 (10th year of Queen Jinseong), a band of brigands, known as “Jeokgojeok [Red-pants Brigands],” started to ravage southwestern Silla. These brigands wearing red trousers, as their name suggests, eventually moved northeast and plundered Moryang-ri in the vicinity of the capital city (present-day Geoncheon-eup, Gyeongju). A man named Son Sun who lived in Moryang-ri during King Heungdeok’s reign donated his house to have it converted into a Buddhist temple (Honghyosa). A stone bell that

was dug out of the ground and installed in this temple is said to have been stolen during the raid by the Jeokgojeok. The Jeokgojeok were feared as they traveled great distances to plunder places in wide-reaching areas, even raiding villages located right at the edge of the capital city.

In some records, the Jeokgojeok are described as “ruthless brigands of Baekje.” In fact, the southwestern section of Silla used to be the old territory of Baekje. Hence, this wording could be interpreted to mean ‘ruthless brigands’ based in the former Baekje area. On the other hand, it is also possible that the Jeokgojeok proclaimed themselves to be the descendants of Baekje people. If the latter were true, their actions could have been, in part, politically motivated. It would also mean that they laid claim to the heritage of Baekje even before King Gyeon Hwon did.

In the sixth lunar month, 897 (11th year of Queen Jinseong’s reign), the queen decided to pass the throne to her nephew, Kim Yo. In a diplomatic letter informing Tang about the transfer of power, the rampages by brigands across Silla were described in the following words: “Bands of brigands are engaged in lunatic behavior, and towns, set on fire by them, appear like gigantic pieces of burning charcoal. In the wake of these relentless and merciless killers, only piles of skeletons are left like forests of bones... Once great, Silla has now become a sick country.” Moreover, in another letter to Tang this time, reporting the succession to the throne by King Hyogong, one reads, “...today, villages have all become the dens of brigands, and every inch of the country a battlefield. Why are the Heavens punishing our country with all these calamities?”

The outbreak of uprisings by peasants in 889, in other words, in the third year of Queen Jinseong’s reign, was the beginning of a long series of peasants’ revolts in Silla. With no respite in nationwide uprisings in sight, the queen had to step down. Although officially, Silla met its demise when King Gyeongsun capitulated to Goryeo in 935, the kingdom had already begun a slow march toward this inevitable end in 889 when its peasantry first rose up against the government.

## Emergence of Hojok

### Background

After the unification of the Three Kingdoms, Silla set up nine *ju* and five

*sogyeong* for the administration of its expanded territory, also dispatching administrators to various towns and counties across the country. This system enabled the control and influence of the central government to reach far and wide across the territory. However, starting in the later part of the Middle period, there were frequent political feuds between *jingol* aristocrats. To make matters yet worse, battles for the throne were continually breaking out as well. All of this undercut the central government’s ability to effectively govern the country. This weakened the control of the central government, leaving room for influential local clans to grow into powerful groups. These groups of people were known as “hojok.”

Jang Bogo, famously known for his Cheonghae Garrison (Cheonghaejin) and his sobriquet the “The Trade Prince of Maritime Commercial Empire” or ‘King of the Sea,’ was also an early example of a *hojok* leader. After the rise and fall of Jang Bogo, similarly ambitious overlords appeared in various places around the country. Ajagae, the father of King Gyeon Hwon, who founded Later Baekje, was a simple farmer before he went to Sabulseong (present-day Sangju) with his followers and called himself “General” during the Gwanggye era. Gwanggye was an era name used between 885 and 887. Overlords of late Silla called themselves Seongju (Castellan) or Janggun (General). In around 887, Ajagae was therefore the overlord of Sabulseong in Sangju.

Meanwhile, Ijae—whose full title is *Hogug uiyeong dojang jungalchan*—erected the octagonal stone lantern Palgakdeungnu in Suchang-gun (present-day Daegu) in 908 (12th year of King Hyogong’s reign) for his country. He built a fortress on an elevated vantage point and ruled the surrounding area for ten years. Ijae, therefore, was the warlord ruling over Suchang-gun. When the peasants’ revolts broke out in 889 (3rd year of Queen Jinseong’s reign) throughout the country, he probably extended protection to the population of this area, as the castellan, consolidating his power base in the process. Similarly, Yi Chongeon sheltered the inhabitants of Byeokjin-gun (present-day Seongju) in his fortress, when raids by brigands were at their fiercest. As the castellan of the county fortress of Byeokjin-gun, Yi Chongeon also protected local residents from attacks by peasant rebels.

While the central government failed to respond to the chaos and insecurity caused by peasant uprisings that began in 889, local overlords built fortresses and deployed their private armies to protect people in their respective areas. Through this process, *hojok* became even more



Fig 3. Iron Flagpole with Inscription, Yongdusa Temple Site, Cheongju

independent from the central government.

Some of the *bojok* were aristocrats who had left Gyeongju to return to their home base. Ijae, the lord of Suchang-gun, for instance, had the court rank of Jungalchan (Jungachan). Jungachan was the rank received by aristocrats of the *yukdupum* (head-rank six) class who could not aspire to become *Daeachan*, a rank reserved for the *jingol* class. Ijae, therefore, could have decided to return to his hometown, as his prospects in the central government were limited by his *yukdupum* status. Moreover, Kim Ye (later Wang Ye by adopting the surname of Wang Geon, the founding king of Goryeo), who succeeded to Kim Sunsik as the ruler of Myeongju, was a descendant of Kim Juwon. Kim Juwon, who was edged out in his race to the throne by Kim Gyeongsin (King Wonseong), retired to Myeongju.

Also, some of the aristocrats of Gyeongju were relocated to key cities outside the capital as part of a policy to ensure the centralized rule of territory. A number of the descendants of these people became *bojok* lords of late Silla. Sometime in the mid-tenth century, in Cheongju, Kim Yejong, a man of the rank of Dangdaedeung and a scion of one of the most illustrious families in the area, is said to have proposed the construction of a temple flagpole. As this man died before he could see the project through, it was completed instead by his cousins—Dangdaedeung Kim Huiil, Daedeung, Kim Seokhui, Kim Gwangyeom—who gathered the necessary financial resources and supervised the construction. Cheongju was before then Seowongyeong, one of the local capital cities of Unified Silla. In 983 (2nd year of Goryeo King Seongjong's reign), the titles, Dangdaedeung and Daedeung, were changed to Hojang and Buhojang, respectively. The Kim clan, which thus sponsored the flagpole project, comprised descendants of the *jingol* aristocrats who had been relocated to Seowongyeong by the central government.

The central government set up garrisons in borderland and coastal regions and stationed troops there. Some of the commanders of these borderland and coastal forces emerged as *bojok* lords. The Paegangjin Garrison in Pyeongsan, Hwanghae-do, for example, was established in 782 (3rd year of King Seondeok's reign) to ensure the stability of the area north of the Yeseong River and south of the Daedong River. Bak Jikyun, the founder of the Bak clan of Pyeongsan, was assigned to a post in a remote place, although he was a descendant of Bak Hyekgeose. After his term as the commander of the Pyeongsan Garrison, Bak Jikyun chose to

stay on there. He called himself Daemodal, which is a military official's title used in Goguryeo, equivalent in rank to a Chinese general. Bak Jikyun, therefore, became the *bojok* lord of Pyeongsan. By using a Goguryeo title to refer to himself, he appears to have laid claim to Goguryeo heritage, thus dissociating himself from Silla. Aside from Paegangjin, there were other garrisons, including Bukjin in Samcheok and naval garrisons such as Hyeolgujin in Ganghwa and Dangseongjin in Hwaseong. Some other garrisons whose names are today unknown existed along the west and south coasts. Commanders of some of these garrisons probably became *bojok* as well.

Although Jang Bogo's reign as the 'King of the Sea' ended with his assassination, similar maritime trade tycoons with private armies later emerged in various places along the west and south coasts of Korea. Jakjegeon, the grandfather of King Taejo Wang Geon, is said to have met the Dragon King during his journey across the West Sea onboard a merchant ship and married the latter's daughter, receiving seven treasures. Upon his return from the palace of the Dragon King, the people of the four *ju* and three *byeon* at the estuaries of the Yeseong River and Han River built Yeongan Fortress for him. What we can infer from this legend is that Jakjegeon amassed considerable wealth through maritime trade and became an influential political figure in Songak (present-day Gaeseong). Wang Ryung, the son of Jakjegeon, held the title of Sachan of Songak-gun as of 896 (10th year of Queen Jinseong's reign) and is said to have offered his county to Gungye, pledging allegiance to him. Wang Ryung, therefore, was the *bojok* of Songak or enjoyed a status similar to that.

In 924 (8th year of King Gyeongmyeong's reign), Wang Bonggyu, then Jeoldosa of Cheongju, sent envoys to Later Tang to offer tribute. In the third lunar month, 927 (4th year of King Gyeongae's reign), Minzong of the Later Tang bestowed upon Wang Bonggyu the title 'Hoehwa daejanggun.' In the fourth lunar month of the same year, Jigangjusa Wang Bonggyu had Im Eon bear tribute items to Minzong, who gave the latter gifts in return. Cheongju is today's Uiryeong in Gyeongsangnam-do, and Jeoldosa is a Tang title for a local military administrator. Gangju in 'Jigangjusa' is today's Jinju, and Jisa appears to be the short form of the Tang title 'Jijujegunsa.' Wang Bonggyu thus was a *bojok* lord calling himself Jeoldosa or Jisa. The profits garnered from trade with the Later Tang probably financed his rise to political prominence.

In some cases, the leaders of peasant rebels became *bojok*. In 905 (9th year of King Hyogong's reign), Geomyong, the Seongju or Janggun of Pyeongyang, and Myeonggwı, a brigand leader of Jeunseong (present-day Jeungsan-gun), a town near Pyeongyang, pledged allegiance to King Gungye. In contrast to Geomyong, described as a castellan or general, Myeonggwı is referred to as a red-clad or yellow-clad brigand, hence possibly related to the Jeokgojeok whose uniform was also red trousers. Both the Jeokgojeok and Jeoguijeok (red-clad brigands) or Hwanguijeok (yellow-clad brigands) were originally peasants. While the Jeokgojeok eventually died out, being a group with no geographical base, the latter groups seem to have settled in Jeungseong and become *bojok*.

Neungchang, the leader of a band of brigands based in Aphae-hyeon (Aphae Island, Sinan-gun), had a base of followers who were runaways and exiles of various sorts. In 909 (13th year of King Hyogong's reign), he attempted an attack on Wang Geon's forces, in coalition with other bands of brigands from nearby islands. But he was captured by Wang Geon's troops and brought before King Gungye. King Gungye is recorded as having mocked him, saying, "The great leader of the pirates is now a miserable captive." For King Gungye to see the irony of Neungchang's fate, the latter must have been quite well-known as a force to be contended with in this sea area off Sinan. By bringing together runaway farmers and fishermen who became brigands or vagrants, Neungchang appears to have become a *bojok* with Aphae-hyeon under his control.

*Chonju* (village chiefs) were local gentry who administered their villages as aides or surrogates to the official sent from the central government. *Yi* (吏), the low-ranking administrators of the local government, also belonged to the local gentry class. As the central government's power waned, and its influence over the overall territory weakened, these people gained in political clout and saw their social status enhanced. A certain Uryeon who was a *chonju* died fighting the peasant rebels led by Wonjong and Aeno. It was probably to protect his own power base that Uryeon had taken the helm of forces fighting the rebels. The queen ordered the young son of Uryeon to succeed to his position as the *chonju*. The peasant uprisings in 889 served as the opportunity for local dignitaries like *chonju* and *yi* to become ever more independent of the centralized rule.

### Independence

The *hojok* had their own organizational structures similar to that of the central government. In 925 (2nd year of King Gyeongae's reign), Neungmun, the General of Goul-bu (present-day Yeongcheon) went over to Goryeo with his troops to submit himself. At that time Neungmun was accompanied by two officials with the titles *Sirang* and *Daegam*. The Sirang was the second highest official of the Jipsaseong, and the Daegam the Deputy Ministers of Byeongbu (Defense Ministry) or Siwibu (Royal Guard). Meanwhile, Kim Ye was *Doryeong* (Chief Secretary) of Myeongju as of 940 (23rd year of Goryeo Taejo's reign), having the rank of Jwaseung. He had officials like the Jipsanangjung, Wonoerang and Saekjipsa as his aides. As for official titles such as Dangdaedeung and Daedeung that the major *hojok* of Cheongju gave themselves, they derived from the Sangdaedeung and Daedeung of the Hwabaek, a collegial body that discussed affairs of state in the central government. In other words, they probably set up their own collegial body to deliberate and decide upon important matters in the Cheongju area. Departments like the Byeongbu and Hagwon, reporting to the collegial body, existed, and were staffed with such officials as Sirang, Byeongbugyeong, Hagwongyeong, Hagwonnangjung and Sachang.

The transfer of the title or power of *hojok* was hereditary. Even in the case where such was not the established rule, the title and power of a *hojok* lord remained most often within the same tribe. In rare cases where the power was transferred to another tribe or clan, this was likely to have been arranged between the two tribes or clans or to have been the outcome of a power struggle. In contrast, the transfer of the local administrators occurred as a result of an appointment by the central government. As a matter of policy, the central government removed local administrators from their post after a certain period of time to avoid their forming too close ties with local clans. For example, an inspector called 'Oesajeong' was dispatched to keep the local administrators under surveillance. This was the main difference between a *hojok* lord and a local administrator.

*Hojok* levied taxes on peasants and drafted labor forces, which were essential tasks for maintaining and expanding their power base. *Hojok* armed slaves and trained displaced peasants to become soldiers. Local peasants were also enlisted into fighting forces, when the need arose. In contrast, local administrators collected taxes from peasants within their jurisdiction and sent them to the central government and mobilized them for labor according to

specific orders issued by the latter. They met their security responsibility by deploying army corps stationed near their jurisdiction or local troops. This is another aspect in which local officials differed from *hojok*. *Hojok* were independent from the central government not only politically, but also at an economic and military level.

Some *hojok* remained loyal to Silla's Crown. Yi Jae of Suchang-gun, who gave himself the title, 'Hoguk uiyeong dojang,' is just such an example. However, the vast majority were against the central government or at least independent from it. Many of them also crossed over to Later Baekje or Goryeo. Gongjik, the General of Maegok-hyeon (present-day Hoebuk-myeon, Boeun-gun), submitted himself to King Gyeon Hwon of Later Baekje and became one of his deputies. Later, he shifted his allegiance to King Taejo Wang Geon of Goryeo. It was based on a calculation of self-interest that *hojok* decided to which of Silla, Later Baekje and Goryeo they declared their allegiance. By this time, the fate of Silla was in the hands of the *hojok*.

## 3

## Establishment of the Later Three Kingdoms and the Fall of Silla

### Establishment of Later Baekje and Later Goguryeo

Gyeon Hwon was born in 867 (7th year of King Gyeongmun's reign) to Ajagae, the General of Sabulseong. Around the time when he turned twenty years of age, he joined the army and became stationed in the royal capital. Later when he was assigned to a unit in the southwestern coastal area, he quickly climbed the ladder of the military hierarchy, as he was noticed by his superior for his various talents. In 889 (3rd year of Queen Jinseong's reign), when peasant uprisings broke out across the country, he took advantage of the chaos to overtly turn against Silla. In 892 (6th year of Queen Jinseong's reign), Gyeon Hwon occupied Muju (present-day Gwangju) and behaved as a king. He did not quite call himself king yet, contenting himself with the title 'Silla seomyeon dotong.' In other words, he declared himself as an official of Silla governing the western section of the country. This was probably based on the calculation that it was better for the time being to not completely withdraw his allegiance from Silla.

In 900 (4th year of King Hyogong's reign), Gyeon Hwon founded his own country, proclaiming this as an act of vengeance for the fallen kingdom of Baekje. Gyeon Hwon went to Wansanju (present-day Jeonju) and there he declared, "Kim Yusin of Silla raced to Hwangsan, then to Sabi, leaving clouds of dust behind him, and conquered Baekje by joining forces with the

Tang dynasty. I shall today make Wansan the new capital and finally avenge King Uija's humiliation." Gyeon Hwon mustered support for the new state by stirring up the memory of Baekje in the minds of the local populace. Gyeon Hwon's country has been given the name 'Later Baekje' (Hubaekje) to distinguish it from Baekje of the Three Kingdoms Period.

One of the first things King Gyeon Hwon did upon creating the new country was to send tribute to the state of Wuyue in China. The King of Wuyue is said to have sent envoys to King Gyeon Hwon in return, offering him the title Jianjiao taibao (K. *Geomgyo taebo*, 檢校太保). Although the timing of the exchange of envoys between the two states is open to question, what is clear is that King Gyeon Hwon sought international recognition to give legitimacy to his reign. Considering King Gyeon Hwon's rather modest background as the son of a local *hojok* and a commander of a borderland army division, he probably quite badly needed some recognition from the Chinese if his new country were to become an equal to Silla.

In the eighth lunar month, 901 (5th year of King Hyogong's reign), King Gyeon Hwon mounted an attack on Daeyaseong (present-day Hapcheon). Daeyaseong was a town that was fiercely disputed over by Baekje and Silla during the Three Kingdoms Period. Kim Pumseok, the son-in-law of Kim Chunchu, for instance, died defending this place from Baekje forces. For Silla, Daeyaseong indeed was the first outpost of defense against invasion by Later Baekje. Silla emerged victorious in the Battle of Daeyaseong, putting a temporary stop to the eastern advance of Later Baekje's forces.

In 891 (5th year of Queen Jinseong's reign), Gungye, who was a Buddhist monk in Sedal Temple in Yeongwol, became an officer of Gihwon, a potentate of Jukju (present-day Juksan-myeon, Anseong). Soon afterwards, he fought under the command of Yanggil of Bugwon (present-day Wonju). In 894 (8th year of Queen Jinseong's reign), he built his own base of followers. In 896 (10th year of Queen Jinseong's reign), he brought Cheorwon and its environs in the northern section of central Korea under his control. In 899 (3rd year of King Hyogong's reign), he defeated the army of Yanggil, his former lord. In 901 (5th year of King Hyogong's reign), he founded his own country. Just as Gyeon Hwon swore to avenge Baekje, Gungye declared the revenge of Goguryeo as his reason for founding the new country. He said, "In the past, Silla asked Tang for troops and crushed Goguryeo. Pyeongyang, the old capital city of Goguryeo, is today a desolate place overgrown with wild weeds. I will not rest until justice is served."

Later in 904 (8th year of King Hyogong's reign), he changed the name of the country to Majin, then to Taebong in 911 (15th year of King Hyogong's reign).

In 906 (10th year of King Hyogong's reign), King Gungye gained control of the Sangju area. He then ordered that a feng shui-based rumor that Geumseong was soon to fall be spread across the country. Gungye is said to have killed all those who came from Silla, attempting to pledge allegiance to him; a rather implausible account. It could be that Gungye, by policy, refused special treatment to Silla royalty or members of the ruling elite, which later gave rise to more sanguinary accounts. In another anecdote, Gungye, who was passing by Buseoksa Temple, entered the temple. When he saw a portrait of a Silla king on a temple mural, he is said to have struck it with his sword. The mark of the blade on the mural was visible even during the Goryeo period. The Buseoksa Temple incident is consistent in spirit with his harsh stance with regard to Silla's ruling class in Geumseong. After conquering Sangju, Gungye made his hostility against Silla public.

Gungye is said to have been born a Silla prince and been saved at the brink of being put to death by his own father king when he was an infant. However, the fact that they could not establish who the king who fathered Gungye was even at the time of publication of *Samguk sagi* cast doubt on the veracity of this account about his background. Some historians conjecture that Gungye was a scion of an influential *jingol* clan and was sent away from the capital at a young age when his clan became the victim of a political feud. At any rate, Gungye's attitude toward Silla seems to have derived from deep-seated grudges against its royal family and ruling aristocrats.

Although Gungye overtly expressed his intention to conquer Silla, there are no written records reporting any attack on Silla conducted by him. In 904 (8th year of King Hyogong's reign), he tried to forge a new image for his country by renaming it Majin and selecting Mutae as the era name. Gwangpyeongseong and other government offices were established at this time, with a rank system for government officials also put into place. In 905 (9th year of King Hyogong's reign), the capital city was changed from Songak to Cheorwon. Gungye was therefore busy with building government systems and is likely to have judged it more important than external conquests at least at this point in time. On several occasions in 909 (13th year of King Hyogong's reign), Gungye's forces battled with Later

Baekje over the Naju area. These armed clashes with Later Baekje must also have contributed to his decision not to attack Silla. The situation was similar for Later Baekje which could not afford to attack Silla due to its forces being tied down because of battles in the Naju area. At all events, this was a much appreciated respite for Silla.

Gungye eventually claimed to be a living Maitreya and tried to demonstrate his authority as a political ruler and spiritual leader. He insisted that he could read the mind of the others and framed those who opposed him politically as traitors and cut them down. However, his autocracy created huge resistance and finally a coup d'état led by Wang Geon occurred to destroy Taebong in the sixth lunar month, 918. After his coup, Wang Geon established Goryeo and became King Taejo.

### Pro-Goryeo Policy and Later Baekje's Invasion of Geumseong Palace

In the first lunar month, 920 (4th year of King Gyeongmyeong's reign), Silla exchanged diplomatic delegations with Goryeo, thus establishing amicable ties with it. In the tenth lunar month of the same year, Gyeon Hwon conquered Daeyaseong and advanced toward Jillye (present-day Gimhae), leading a force of 10,000 infantry and cavalry. Faced with the crisis, King Gyeongmyeong sent *Achan* Kim Yul to King Taejo (Wang Geon) of Goryeo to ask for troops. Upon the arrival of the Goryeo troops, the invading forces retraced their steps. The agreement between King Gyeongmyeong and King Taejo Wang geon therefore was not just about diplomatic relations, but included a mutual defense pact. In the second lunar month, 921 (5th year of King Gyeongmyeong's reign), 171 Mohe people of the Dalgo branch invaded Deungju (present-day Anbyeon), a town in Silla's northern borderland. The Mohe invaders were decimated by the cavalry of Goryeo General Gyeongwon, stationed in Sakju (present-day Chuncheon). Having learned about this incident, King Gyeongmyeong is said to have sent an envoy to Wang Geon, with a letter of gratitude. This incident is another example confirming the existence of a defensive alliance between the two kingdoms.

In the tenth lunar month, 920 (4th year of King Gyeongmyeong's reign), Wang Geon is quoted as having asked Kim Yul, who came to request

troops, about what was known as the Three Defense Treasures of Silla; in other words, the sixteen-foot Buddha statue (*Jangnyukjonsang*), the nine-story pagoda of Hwangnyongsa Temple, and the jade belt that King Jinpyeong is said to have received from Heaven. Wang Geon was interested in these three treasures insofar as they lent religious support to monarchical authority and legitimacy. As a ruler who rose to power through a coup, Wang Geon was facing internal challenges from the former followers of King Gungye and others who opposed his regime. Externally, King Taejo Wang Geon had to prevent the desertion of *bojok* lords by sending envoys and gifts and addressing them in polite terms. Through efforts of this type, Wang Geon even managed to have a friendly relationship with Later Baekje, its biggest foe, albeit temporarily. As a ruler who was a former warlord of Songak, having served Gungye as his general, then as his minister, Wang Geon was eager to find out about ways to build a king's aura and prestige for himself. This was probably one of the main reasons why Goryeo warmed to Silla.

On Silla's side, King Gyeongmyeong also judged it vital to maintain an amiable relationship with Wang Geon. To begin with, the fall of Gungye, Wang Geon's predecessor who had been so hostile towards Silla, was a welcome event for King Gyeongmyeong. Unlike Gungye, Wang Geon appears to have shown a respectful attitude toward Silla's royal family, probably because he hoped to compensate for the deficit of legitimacy of his regime through association with the ruler of the old kingdom. Moreover, Silla had a strategic interest in preventing Goryeo and Later Baekje from entering into an alliance of any kind. For instance, in the eighth lunar month, 918, King Gyeon Hwon sent *Ilgilchan* Minhap to Goryeo to congratulate Wang Geon on his coronation. Wang Geon warmly received Minhap and gave him kindly and courtly treatment. For Wang Geon fresh at the helm of Goryeo, an envoy from Gyeon Hwon was certainly a welcome guest. But, this made Silla worry about an eventual diplomatic relationship between the two countries. The fact that Silla pursued friendly relations with Goryeo can be inferred from what has been mentioned above.

Entering into a formal relationship with Silla meant that Goryeo had become a legitimate nation, recognized by the latter, and that its stigma as a state created by rebels had been erased. If Goryeo's status was visibly enhanced through this alliance, Silla's status declined commensurately as a result. In the second lunar month, 920 (4th year of King Gyeongmyeong's

reign), in other words, shortly after this alliance became formalized, Yunong, the General of Gangju (present-day Jinju) defected to Goryeo. Many other *bojok* of the Gyeongsang-do area followed suit thereafter to pledge allegiance to Goryeo. In the first lunar month, 922 (6th year of King Gyeongmyeong's reign), Wonbong, the General of Hajiseong (Pungsan, Andong), and Sunsik, the General of Myeongju (Gangneung) joined the forces of Wang Geon (according to some sources, Wonbong's defection took place in the sixth lunar month, 922, instead of the first lunar month, 922). Hongsul, the General of Jinboseong (present-day Uiseong) also joined Wang Geon's camp around this time. In the eleventh lunar month, 922, Hongsul dispatched envoys to Goryeo to transmit his intention to surrender, and in the eleventh lunar month of the following year, sent thirty suits of armor to Wang Geon through his son, Wangnip. In the seventh lunar month (or the eighth lunar month), 923 (7th year of King Gyeongmyeong's reign), Yangmun, the General of Gyeongsan-bu (present-day Seongju), defected to Goryeo. This massive wave of defection in favor of Goryeo made Silla further dependent on the latter.

In the eighth lunar month, 924, eight years into his reign, King Gyeongmyeong died. Wang Geon sent envoys to Silla to express his condolences. In the ninth lunar month, King Gyeongae, who succeeded to the throne of King Gyeongmun, in turn, dispatched envoys to Wang Geon. This was probably to give thanks for the condolence embassy and indicate Silla's wish for continued friendship with Goryeo. In the tenth lunar month, 925 (2nd year of King Gyeongae's reign), Neungmun, the General of Goulbu (present-day Yeongcheon) went to Wang Geon to pledge his allegiance to Goryeo. Wang Geon is said to have persuaded Neungmun to go back to Goulbu, having only the latter's officials—Sirang Baegeun, Daegam Myeongjae, Sangsul and Gungsik—stay. This could have been out of consideration for Silla's king, Goulbu being in close proximity to the capital city. However, the real reason was probably to have Neungmun spy on Silla's capital and use Goulbu as an advance base for Goryeo's possible future campaign against the capital city, Geumseong.

In the tenth lunar month, 925 (2nd year of King Gyeongae's reign), Goryeo and Later Baekje exchanged hostages and agreed on a ceasefire. A month later, in the eleventh lunar month of the same year, King Gyeongae sent envoys to Wang Geon to express Silla's disapproval of the ceasefire. The armistice was, however, proposed by Goryeo in order to limit the losses its

forces had sustained at the hands of Later Baekje's troops. As a result, the truce was maintained for some time, in spite of Silla's protest. In the fourth lunar month, 926 (3rd year of King Gyeongae's reign), a Later Baekje hostage in Goryeo died suddenly. Gyeon Hwon suspected foul play and sent troops to Ungjin (present-day Gongju) in retaliation for this alleged murder. Wang Geon ordered his forces in the various fortresses in the area to simply hold their ground and not to engage in battle. King Gyeongae again sent his envoys to Wang Geon at this time to urge Goryeo to attack Later Baekje. To this request, Wang Geon replied, stating that they had to bide their time, and gave no clear explanation for his tactical choice. Wang Geon's rationale was probably that Goryeo forces would not emerge victorious in an all-out war with Later Baekje, at least at that point in time. King Gyeongae's plan was to goad Goryeo into striking Later Baekje, but this was not to happen, as Goryeo's military capability was then inferior to that of its foe.

In the first lunar month, 927 (4th year of King Gyeongae's reign), Wang Geon personally led his troops to strike Yongju (present-day Yonggung, Yecheon), a town under Later Baekje's control. King Gyeongae ordered Silla troops to join this campaign. Although the exact size of the contingent sent by Silla is unknown, the perceived significance of this event as the first joint operation by the Goryeo-Silla coalition forces was probably not insignificant. This decisively hostile move on the part of King Gyeongae against Later Baekje appears to have had a considerable impact on Gyeon Hwon's perception of the situation. In fact, it pushed Gyeon Hwon to launch an attack on Geumseong, Silla's capital city.

In the ninth lunar month of the same year (927), Gyeon Hwon's forces attacked Goulbu and advanced all the way to the outskirts of Silla's capital. King Gyeongae urgently dispatched Yeonsik to Wang Geon to ask for help. Wang Geon ordered Sijung Gonghwon to rush to Silla's rescue with some 10,000 elite troops. Before the arrival of Wang Geon's troops, however, Gyeon Hwon launched a surprise attack in the eleventh lunar month, and Silla's capital fell. King Gyeongae, who was visiting Poseokjeong Pavilion together with his royal consort, concubines and relatives, hurriedly hid himself but was eventually captured by the troops of Later Baekje. Gyeon Hwon forced King Gyeongae to take his own life and made Kim Bu (King Gyeongsun) succeed him. He took high-ranking aristocrat officials as hostages and plundered the palace before returning to Later Baekje. Wang Geon sent a delegation of envoys to express his condolences on King



Fig 4. Poseokjeong Pavilion Site in Gyeongju

Gyeongae's death. He personally led an army of 5,000 elite cavalrymen to fight Later Baekje forces near Donghwa Temple in Mt. Palgong but suffered a huge defeat. Wang Geon lost all his generals in this battle and barely saved his own life. Wang Geon's humiliation aside, Silla revealed for all to see that it was by then in such a reduced state that it could not defend its own capital city.

In the twelfth lunar month of the same year, soon after his attack on Geumseong, King Gyeon Hwon wrote a letter to King Taejo Wang Geon, strongly insisting that out of his loyalty to the "Venerable King", he had entered the royal capital, but "the wicked retainers had already fled, and the king had been slain." King Taejo Wang Geon replied, saying, "I am trying to rescue Silla's government and protect the country from its crisis." Wang Geon, thus, also emphasized his loyalty to the "Venerable King" of Silla. Even when the customary wordings and formal languages of diplomatic

documents are taken into account, the attitudes of King Gyeon Hwon and King Taejo Wang Geon were very different from the overtly hostile stance Gungye had held towards Silla. Although Silla was no longer the military contender it once was, its prestige and eminence as the age-old kingdom of the Korean peninsula was undiminished; hence, its treatment as a suzerain state on the part of King Gyeon Hwon and King Taejo Wang Geon.

Meanwhile, one theory has it that King Gyeongae's death was the result of a ploy by members of the royal Kim clan who were disgruntled about the kings of the Bak clan. The Kim clan, according to this theory, would have used Gyeon Hwon who was also opposed to the kings of the Bak clan for their pro-Goryeo policy and hostility against Later Baekje to eliminate King Gyeongae. In other words, it was by colluding with the *jingol* aristocrats of the Kim clan that Gyeon Hwon was able to succeed in his surprise attack, and the choice of Kim Bu as the next king would have been advised or demanded by the former.

### King Gyeongsun Capitulates to Goryeo

In the eleventh lunar month, 927 (1st year of King Gyeongsun's reign), the funeral of King Gyeongae was held with Wang Geon's envoys attending the ceremony. Battles between Later Baekje and Goryeo continued to rage meanwhile with the former taking the initiative and the latter reacting.

In the twelfth lunar month, 927, Gyeon Hwon's troops invaded Daemok-gun (present-day Yangmok-myeon, Chilgok-gun) and set grain stacks on fire. In the first lunar month, 928 (2nd year of King Gyeongsun's reign), the Goryeo General Kim Sang fell during a battle in Chopalseong (present-day Chogyemyeon Hapcheon-gun) against Later Baekje forces led by Heungjong. In the fifth lunar month of the same year, Yumun, the General of Gangju, joined the camp of Gyeon Hwon. In the eighth lunar month, Gyeon Hwon ordered General Gwanheun to construct a fortress in Yangsan (present-day Yeongdong), but Gwanheun had to retreat from Yangsan, after being attacked by the troops of Wangchung, the General of Myeongjiseong (present-day Pocheon), which had been ordered by Wang Geon. Gyeon Hwon took retreat in Daeyaseong and sent soldiers to plunder Daemok-gun for grain. In the tenth lunar month, Mugokseong (location unknown) fell to Later Baekje forces. In the eleventh lunar month, Oeogokseong (location

unknown) fell to elite troops sent by Gyeon Hwon. As these places were successively brought under Gyeon Hwon's control, Silla's territorial expanse rapidly dwindled. In 929 (3rd year of King Gyeongsun's reign), attacks from Later Baekje continued unabated. In the seventh lunar month, General Hongsul died defending Uiseong-bu Fortress (Present-day Uiseong-gun) from Gyeon Hwon's invading forces. Thereafter, Wonbong, the General of Sunju (present-day Pungsan-myeon, Andong) surrendered to Gyeon Hwon. In the tenth lunar month, Gyeon Hwon's forces launched an attack on Gaeunhyeon (present-day Gaeun-myeon, Mungyeong), but was unable to occupy it.

In the first lunar month, 930 (4th year of King Gyeongsun's reign), Wang Geon delivered a major defeat to Gyeon Hwon in the battle of Byeongsan in Gochang-gun (Andong), thus ending Goryeo's series of losses. In the second lunar month, hearing the news of Wang Geon's victory, King Gyeongsun sent envoys to him to request a meeting. Given that several dozen towns and counties in the Andong and Cheonsong areas had already joined Wang Geon's forces, King Gyeongsun had no choice but to resume talks with him. During this same year, close to 110 towns, from Myeongju to Heungnye-bu (Ulsan), surrendered to Wang Geon.

In the second lunar month, 931 (5th year of King Gyeongsun's reign), Wang Geon arrived in Gyeonggi, accompanied by some fifty cavalrymen, and asked to meet King Gyeongsun. Although he kept the number of accompanying troops to a minimum and politely asked for permission to enter the capital city, there was no ambiguity about who the suzerain was and who the vassal in this situation. King Gyeongsun came to receive Wang Geon at an outdoor location, accompanied by his courtiers. Wang Geon stayed in Silla's capital city for over two months. King Gyeongsun and Wang Geon seem to have discussed many issues related to the fate of Silla. After his return to Gaegyeong, in the eighth lunar month, 931 (5th year of King Gyeongsun's reign), Wang Geon sent King Gyeongsun colorful silk fabrics and a horse with a saddle, along with hemp and silk fabrics for the latter's courtiers and generals. Gifts were also sent for commoners and Buddhist monks; tea and hats for the former and tea and incense for the latter. Wang Geon was, therefore, trying to win the hearts and minds of the people in the capital city.

At the same time, Wang Geon did not slacken the military surveillance of Silla's capital city or cut back on the intimidation being caused by the presence of his troops. He set up the Ireojin Garrison in Singwang-myeon



Fig 5. Tomb of King Gyeongsun in Yeoncheon

of Pohang, a location quite close to Silla's capital. He personally toured the garrison in the second lunar month, 930. Even after his visit to the Silla capital, Wang Geon ordered Neungjang to station their troops at the outskirts of Gyeongju. Also, in 933 (7th year of King Gyeongsun's reign), when he learned about the presence of Later Baekje troops in Hyesanseong (possibly a town near Gyeongju) and Abuljin (in the environs of Gyeongju), Wang Geon sent Daegwang Yu Geumpil there to prevent an attack on the capital city. Yu Geumpil defeated the Later Baekje forces led by Singeom in Satan (present-day Hayang, Gyeongsan) and entered Gyeongju. Seeing Yu Geumpil approach the city, its inhabitants rushed out to welcome him, saying in tears, "If not for Daegwang, we would have been horrifically killed, filleted like fish." The inhabitants of Gyeongju thus appear to have lived in fear of yet another attack by Later Baekje. Yu Geumpil stayed in Geumseong for seven days. On his way back to Goryeo, he again inflicted a huge defeat on Singeom's forces, thereby temporarily restoring peace.

In the ninth lunar month, 934 (8th year of King Gyeongsun's reign),

Goryeo definitively gained the upper hand over Later Baekje by emerging victorious in the Battle of Unju (present-day Hongseong). Gyeon Hwon personally commanded an armored unit of 5,000 soldiers. Over 3,000 Later Baekje soldiers were killed or captured alive by Goryeo forces led by Yu Geumpil. Upon hearing how Gyeon Hwon's troops were annihilated by Yu Geumpil's forces, some thirty towns in the area north of Ungjin surrendered to Goryeo.

Meanwhile, Later Baekje was in an upheaval related to the succession of the throne. Gyeon Hwon had more than ten sons between his wives. However, he preferred his fourth son Geumgang to the others and decided to bequeath his crown to Geumgang. Geumgang's elder brothers, Singeom Yanggeom, and Yonggeom opposed their father's decision. In the third lunar month, 935 (9th year of King Gyeongsun's reign), Singeom carried out a coup to overthrow Gyeon Hwon and had him imprisoned in Geumsan Temple in Gimje. However, only months later, in the sixth lunar month, Gyeon Hwon and his followers escaped to Naju and then to Goryeo to go into exile there. Gyeon Hwon taking refuge in Goryeo was the last straw, and by this time the situation was completely favorable toward Goryeo.

In the tenth lunar month of the ninth year of his reign (935), King Gyeongsun discussed Silla's surrender to Goryeo with his courtiers. The opinion of his court was divided, but, nevertheless, the king had Sirang Kim Bonghyu carry a letter indicating his wish to capitulate to Wang Geon. The crown prince who was opposed to capitulation is said to have retired to Mt. Gaegol (Mt. Geumgang) where he spent the rest of his life, dressed in hemp clothes and living on wild grass. He was the famous Prince Maui. In the eleventh lunar month, King Gyeongsun left Gyeongju, accompanied by his courtiers. The king's procession, departing from the capital, extended 30 *li* (1 *li* being about 400 meters). Wang Geon waited for King Gyeongsun outside the city and received him warmly. He offered the king a stately palace building and found a husband for his eldest daughter, Princess Nangnang. In the twelfth lunar month, the abdicated king was bestowed with the title "Jeongseunggong" and offered 1,000 *seok* of rice as an annual salary. Geumseong was thereafter called Gyeongju and was given to Kim Bu as his domain. Thus closed the last chapter of Silla's 1,000 years of history.

# 4

## From Silla to Goryeo

### Causes of Silla's Decline and Fall

According to the accepted view, the transition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages in Korea occurred with the fall of Silla and founding of Goryeo. The fall of Silla was therefore an epoch-changing event not unlike the fall of the Roman Empire that ushered in the Middle Ages in Europe. In what follows, let us explore factors that caused the decline and fall of this kingdom that enjoyed a remarkable longevity of 1,000 years, making some parallels with the causes of the fall of the Roman Empire, when appropriate. Silla's decline and fall were caused by political, economic, social, ideological factors as well as factors related to international politics.

The Hwabaek meeting for deliberation on major national issues remained in practice right through to the Unified Silla period. However, the Hwabaek lost some of its importance as the policy deliberation body during the Middle period. The Jipsabu, originally close in nature to the king's secretariat, commensurately gained in importance. The Sijung (Jungsi), the Minister of the Jipsabu, became the king's right-hand man. This change increased the power of the king, and the royal kinsmen of the King Muyeol line came to dominate the political scene. The *jingol* aristocrats, who found themselves sidelined as a result, naturally disapproved of these developments.

The situation was similar in the Late period. Close relatives of the kings, namely, those of the King Wonseong's lineage, held a monopoly of power. Hence, the strife and feuds among the *jingol* aristocrats were in a way inevitable. During King Heondeok's reign, Kim Heonchang, discontented with the monopoly of power held by members of the Wonseong line, rebelled against the crown. He denied the legitimacy of Silla and proclaimed the establishment of a new country. His rebellion had huge reverberations throughout the country. Later, after the death of King Heungdeok, a war of succession raged for a little more than two years. Three contenders to the crown lost their lives in this war; namely, Kim Gyunjeong, King Huigang and King Minae. All three descended from King Wonseong. The descendants of King Wonseong, by then, were divided into several different branches that warred against each other for the throne.

These chronic disputes among the *jingol* aristocrats over political power and the throne undercut the government's ability to effectively control and rule over the country. To make matters even worse, Silla experienced frequent droughts and natural disasters, resulting in crop failures. The central government was increasingly unable to properly respond to these situations. Crop failures led to famines, and peasants abandoned their famine-stricken towns, roaming the country as vagrants or becoming brigands. As the chaos persisted, local warlords, known as *bojok*, emerged in various places across the country. As has been mentioned already, during the Unified Silla period, Silla had a local administrative system, consisting of nine cities and five local capitals, which helped with the centralized rule of the country. The central government knew some detail of the situations of towns and villages in the province, as evidenced by the surviving census documents. But, as time went by, more and more of these towns and villages were brought under the control of *bojok* lords. However, although the peasant uprisings and emergence of *bojok* were the direct causes of Silla's fall, it was the feuds among *jingol* aristocrats that created an environment conducive to these developments.

*Nogeupje*, the salary system for *jingol* aristocrats that was discontinued for a time, was revived during King Gyeongdeok's reign. In addition to *nogeup* received from the king, *jingol* aristocrats also owned land that was passed down to them over multiple generations. Some of them also owned livestock farms. By buying more land and farms to add to these various existing assets, *jingol* aristocrats eventually came to own huge estates.

Buddhist temples also expanded their land ownership in a similar fashion, by adding new plots of land donated by the king or aristocrats or by buying up land, and merging existing plots of land together. *Jingol* aristocrats and Temple owned farms were exempted from taxation by both legal and illegal means. Peasants, on the other hand, were increasingly stripped of their land. The burden of taxes avoided by *jingol* aristocrats and Buddhist temples shifted to the peasants, while the tax burden of those peasants who abandoned their villages had to be borne by those who remained.

Silla's peasants were made to endure many sacrifices, and events like the unification wars had had devastating consequences for them. Even in peace time, their livelihood was regularly threatened by crop failures, and famine was frequent. The surviving village census documents provide some concrete information about the situation facing Unified Silla peasants, but there are still many issues on which scholarly opinion is divided, including when exactly the documents were drafted and what types of villages they were. Notwithstanding, most historians agree at least on the fact that these villages seem to have become gradually impoverished. The households of a village were divided into nine classes according to their income. In the four villages included in these census documents, those belonging to the highest income group were graded sixth class, and these households represented a small minority. The largest number of households was graded ninth class at the bottom of the scale. Also, the population appears to have been decreasing, with some households marked as having fled the village. Moreover, the number of adult men was significantly smaller than that of adult women, suggesting that there were men who fled the village to avoid becoming drafted for labor. What emerges from these census documents gives some measure of the plight faced by the late Unified Silla peasantry, causing them to rise up against the government in 889 (3rd year of Queen Jinseong's reign).

In 834 (9th year of King Heungdeok's reign), the royal government issued a special edict to regulate the immoderate lifestyle of Silla's aristocrats. This document lists numerous foreign-imported luxury goods such as seulseul, a gemstone mined in Tashkent and the Aral Sea region, woolen fabrics of Persian origin, kingfisher feathers from Cambodia, tortoise shells from Borneo or Java or red sandalwood of Sumatran origin. The gilt homes, known as "geumiptaek," in the capital city of the Late period are also indicative of just how opulent the lifestyle of *jingol* aristocrats at that

time was. Japanese history books, for instance, mention Bakfu buildings as the example of an obscenely rich lifestyle which ultimately led to the fall of the Muromachi Shogunate. But, these were small pavilions that were gilded or thinly covered with silver. Silla's "geumiptaek," were large mansions of the size of Yeongyeong Hall in Changgyeong Palace. Above thirty-nine such gilt buildings existed in the capital city at that time.

Some historians called this exorbitant lifestyle and decadence prevalent among ninth-century Silla aristocrats a 'diseased urban culture,' as opposed to a 'healthy countryside culture,' and argued that it was inevitable that the former was brought to its demise by the latter. The prosperity in the royal capital was made possible through the sacrifices of the peasantry. The uprisings of 889 were the manifestations of the anger of the Silla peasants who thus attempted to put an end to this unacceptable inequality.

The bone-rank system (*golpumje*) was essentially a system devised so that the people of the royal capital could have a permanent hold on their rights and privileges. The central government relocated, by policy, some of the *jingol* aristocrats and members of the ruling elite to cities outside the capital area. Those who were sent to settle in these places, however, were gradually sidelined in their careers and were faced with barriers to their political ambitions. Also, it is important to remember that of the five local capital cities of Unified Silla, except Geumgwan sogyeong, all others were located outside Silla's original territory. Also, the local power holders had been given different 'provincial titles' (*oevi*) from the 'capital titles' (*gyeongwi*) bestowed on the nobility based in the capital. As the unification war progressed, however, they were also given capital titles. Nevertheless, they did not become 'bone-rank' nobility. For this reason their path to positions as officials in the central government was blocked. Village heads (*chonju*) were only accorded the status of head-rank (*dupum*) four or five.

As has been discussed already, local potentates, known as *bojok*, emerged in late Silla, in various parts of the country and became independent power holders. In 900, Gyeon Hwon founded Later Baekje, swearing to gain vengeance for the past conquest of Baekje by Silla. Gungye, in 901 established his own country, declaring the revenge of Goguryeo. In 918, Wang Geon became the ruler of Taebong through a coup and changed the country's name to Goryeo, thus laying claim to Goguryeo's heritage. They appealed to the nostalgia that the people in former territories of Baekje and Goguryeo felt about these by-gone kingdoms. Many of

the *bojok* turned their back on Silla to join Later Baekje or Goryeo. The situation, however, could have unfolded vastly differently had Silla not been such a closed society. Silla failed to overcome the rise of secessionism largely because of its prejudice in which Geumseong, Silla's Capital was favored to the exclusion of all other regions.

In the Middle period, the Buddhist cult of the Pure Land of Amitabha, with its strongly pessimistic and escapist undertones, became widely popular. Escapism, although rooted in a critical perception of reality, is a passive rejection of that reality and is devoid of the will to transform it. In this sense, the Pure Land cult, rather than being a force challenging the increasingly dysfunctional regime of the Middle period, appears to have contributed to the maintenance of the status quo, at least to some degree. In the Late period, however, amid the widespread end time consciousness, there seems to have been an ardent desire among the people for the advent of Maitreya. King Gungye's self-proclamation as Maitreya, for instance, was a phenomenon that emerged against such a backdrop. Maitreya is the Future Buddha that is promised to come to the world to establish a utopian order. Therefore, it is highly likely that the cult of Maitreya was closely related to the desire for radical change among the people. Thus, this end time consciousness and the hope and expectancy of Maitreya's coming might have been some of the factors that shaped the social atmosphere in a manner that was propitious to the peasant uprisings in late Silla.

Among the royalty and *jingol* aristocrats, Hwaeom Buddhism was highly popular from the Middle period. In the Late period, Zen Buddhism gradually gained influence. Zen masters were initially patronized by the royal family and formed close ties with it. Later, however, they increasingly became allies of *bojok* lords in their respective regions. There was a natural affinity between Zen Buddhist monks, who held pro-individualist values, and the independent-minded *bojok* who resisted the centralized rule of Unified Silla. A growing number of them also accepted the patronage of the rulers of the two rebel states, Later Baekje and Goryeo. *Bojok* were, moreover, favorably disposed to feng shui, of which Zen Buddhist Masters were the chief popularizers. *Bojok* lords used feng shui to bolster claims made in defense of their own regional power base. This undermined and discredited the Geumseong, the capital city-centered territorial view upheld by the central government.

Silla's fall was also partly the result of a changed international landscape

in the East Asian region. The rulers of the Sui and Tang dynasties, after their unification of China, sought to build an international order that was centered on China. The fate of the three rival kingdoms, Goguryeo, Baekje and Silla, was in part determined by this Chinese policy. The outcome of the wars between them was the establishment of Unified Silla and Balhae. Around this time, an ancient imperial state was established in the Japanese archipelago, with the Taika reform and the enactment of the code of law, Taihoryo, providing the basic framework for a new, centralized rule.

Silla's fall in the early tenth century coincided with major upheavals in East Asian politics. Tang and Balhae met their demise, and in Japan, the direct rule by the emperor ended, and the Fujiwara regency known as the Sekkan government began. One of the factors that possibly influenced the continuity of the dynasty on the Korean Peninsula was the investiture-tribute relationship with China. As Silla rulers received their investiture from Tang they found their position considerably weakened upon the demise of the Chinese dynasty.

Tang was shaken to the roots by the An Shi Rebellion of 755, which lasted for almost nine years. In the aftermath of this rebellion, military governors, previously only appointed in borderland regions, were placed at the helm of local governments across the country. These military governors progressively became autonomous and eventually challenged the authority of the imperial government. In 875, the Huang Chao Rebellion broke out, and order was restored only in 884. The Huang Chao Rebellion played a direct role in the fall of Tang. Tang was also brought to its knees by the emergence of warring lords and agrarian rebellion, while Silla perished as a result of peasant rebellions and the emergence of *bojok*. There was therefore a certain parallel between the two states during the last decades of their existence.

Finally, the tail end of Silla's existence, the Later Three Kingdoms period and the unification by Goryeo coincide with the last years of Tang the Five Dynasties period and the unification of China by the Song dynasty. Although slightly later chronologically, in Japan the Kamakura Shogunate emerged, inaugurating the Middle Ages in that country. Hence, the fall of Silla and founding of Goryeo had an international significance for East Asia, and their causes could also be elucidated more fully through international factors.

## The Significance of the Social Change

In most primers on Korean history, published since the 1960s, antiquity in the Korean peninsula is considered to have concluded with the end of Silla, with the Middle Ages beginning with Goryeo. This periodization is based on no particular theoretical rationale or justification. It is an approximation, made convenient by the change of dynasty. On the other hand, changes of dynasty were rather rare after the unification of the Three Kingdoms, occurring only twice, from Silla to Goryeo and from Goryeo to Joseon. Due to this extreme longevity of Korean dynasties, the emergence of a new dynasty certainly entailed measurable changes across all sectors of society, from politics to society, economy and culture. Therefore, this periodization is not without some merit.

Some historians found justifications for this periodization in the large social changes that occurred between late Silla and early Goryeo. One of the most remarkable changes was the reduction in size, and collapse, of large family groups with close blood ties, which were the basic political actors of ancient societies. Also, in late Silla, against the backdrop of ongoing feuds among *jingol* aristocrats, *bojok* emerged as new powers, at the same time as the farmers who formed the economic base for the ruling elite shed the characteristics of slave-peasants. Moreover, Confucian political ideology gained ground, benefiting from the support of members of the *yukdupum* class and others at the mid-level of the social hierarchy, and earlier Buddhist traditions gave way to Zen Buddhism and its more medieval system of thought. With the introduction of a civil service examination, a meritocratic system was also set up in a society built upon hereditary aristocracy. Finally, a centralized government system was completed, modeled on that of the Tang and Song dynasties.

Others have attempted to justify this periodization from the perspective of the socio-economic history of Korea. The first and foremost difference between late Silla and early Goryeo concerns the taxation of peasants. In Unified Silla, taxes were levied per person or household. In contrast, in Goryeo, farmland taxes were imposed on peasants. In other words, the tax base changed from people or households to land. Another important change that is frequently mentioned regards family groups. Between late Silla and early Goryeo, large family groups with common ancestors lost much of their significance as active units of society. These large clans or

tribes were instead replaced by smaller family clans composed of close relatives, at the same time as relations based on criteria other than blood ties became more important than previously. Meanwhile, historians who view 'community' as a distinctive type of social group that emerged in the Middle Ages have perceived an early form of community in social organisms led by *bojok*, and later by *hyangni*.

Lastly, this periodization is also explained from the perspective of world history. The idea being that feudalism is a system that arose after the vanishing or destruction of a highly-organized political system, precisely in an attempt to revive the defunct system. According to this view, Goryeo, by absorbing the various *bojok* groups that formed across the country in late Silla and reestablishing order, ushered in a feudal society in a way that is similar to how Rushton Coulborn viewed the political restoration movements that rose after the fall of great empires as the birth of feudalism.

According to some historians, one of the major differences that distinguishes the transition phase between Silla and Goryeo from other periods is its ruling elite. These historians call this era the Age of *Hojok*, as opposed to the Age of Absolute Monarchy in mid-Silla and also the Age of Munbeol Aristocrats in early Goryeo. This view has been often criticized for its lack of a theoretical basis for the causal relationship linking the different periods. Nevertheless, as an attempt to comprehensively understand a period by examining its social, political and economic structures and ideological trends from the perspective of human groups as social forces, this view is not entirely without merit.

In Silla, the *golpum* (bone-rank) system served as the main principle of social organization. Members of Silla society enjoyed different levels of political and social rights according to their *golpum* class. Under the *golpum* system, each class had an upper limit in terms of court ranks; in other words, the highest government office to which a person could aspire was predetermined by their social class. Only *jingol* aristocrats could be appointed to high offices such as state ministers or army generals. In late Silla, this practice was called into question by Confucian scholars of the *yukdupum* class, some of whom proposed reforms. These reform proposals were never accepted in Silla where the *golpum* system remained in place through to the very end of its existence. However, the worst of Silla's problems was not the *golpum* system as such. It was rather the fact that opportunities to succeed in a political career were reserved only for

those who were based in the capital city. No local leaders, no matter how influential or capable, were given a *golpum* rank, nor were they allowed to have a political career.

Hojok who emerged as new powers to be contended with in late Silla pledged their allegiance to either Later Baekje or Goryeo, based on a political calculation. Some of them later became members of Goryeo's ruling elite when Goryeo reunified the Korean peninsula. The members of the ruling elite of early Goryeo are commonly referred to as *munbeol* aristocrats who were mostly *hojok* and their descendants. Members of Silla royalty, on the other hand, were now relegated to the position of local clans. *Munbeol* aristocratic families distinguished themselves from each other through their geographical origin which they called "*bongwan*" (place of family origin). Goryeo's nobility was made up of people with different surnames who were native of different places. In this respect, they formed a sharp contrast with Silla's *jingol* aristocrats, all of whom were members of royalty from Geumseong, the capital city.

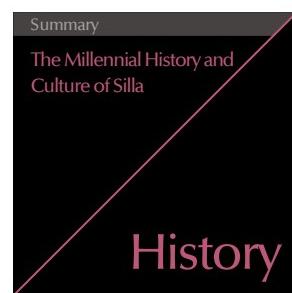
Later, when Goryeo's government attempted to strengthen its centralized rule, policies to weaken the influence of *hojok* were adopted. The first steps in this direction were taken in 983 (2nd year of Goryeo Seongjong's reign) when officials were dispatched to the twelve *mok* (cities), and local administrative offices were overhauled. Thereafter, the *hojok* were relegated to the post of *hyangni*, low-ranking officers assisting the local administrators who were sent from the central government. Their status, however, was quite different from that of *chonju*, the village chiefs of the Silla period. Officials were not sent to all local administrative units. According to "Jiriji" (Geographical appendix) of *Goryeoosa* (History of Goryeo), government-appointed officials were sent to 146 towns only, with none present in the 374 other towns. This level of centralization is far inferior to that of Silla, for instance. In places with no officials from the central government, their role was filled by *hyangni*. As descendants of *hojok*, they still retained much of their authority as local lords.

Like Silla, Goryeo was a hierarchical society. Both social class and profession were passed down from generation to generation. One difference from the Silla system, however, was that there existed a path for *hyangni* to become members of the capital's nobility, provided that they successfully passed the civil service examination (*gwageo*). Furthermore, this was actively encouraged by the central government. Moreover, if they joined the

army, *hyangni* could rise to prominence as military officials. Outstanding combat accomplishments in war time were also rewarded by appointment to high military offices. The existence of these various channels of social mobility in Goryeo could probably be explained by the fact that the capital's nobility was of *hojok* origin just like the *hyangni*.

To sum up, it was the *hojok* in late Silla who toppled the rule of Geumseong, and the capital city *jingol* aristocrats were, therefore, on the one hand, integrated into the capital-based ruling class of Goryeo and on the other, became local *hyangni*. Some of the *hyangni* joined the capital-based nobility through various channels as well. In late Goryeo, a new bureaucratic class of *hyangni* origin, a part of the "Sadaebu," became the important force behind the founding of the Joseon Dynasty. The emergence of *hojok* in late Silla, therefore, had a far-reaching significance in terms of the diversification of ruling forces.

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